

**FROM HYMNODY TO HIP-HOP<sup>1</sup>: BLACK MUSLIM AND BLACK CHRISTIAN  
MALE YOUTH *ARE* RHYMING FOR A REASON AND UTILIZING THEIR  
MOTHER'S WIZDOM--  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH STUDY**

A Dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of  
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

**By**  
**April Jackson**  
**May 2019**

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<sup>1</sup> The course entitled "Hymnody to Hip-Hop Religious: Aspects of Popular Music" was taught by Mark Parsons, PhD Assistant Professor of Religion and Music, Claremont School of Theology and Assistant Dean of Disciples Seminary Foundation Fall 2011. The course covered multiple genres of popular music, with rap music being only one of those.



This dissertation completed by

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has been presented to and accepted by  
the Faculty of the Claremont School of Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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May 2019

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## PREFACE

Well, son, I'll tell you: Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. It's had tacks in it, And splinters,  
And boards torn up, And places with no carpet on the floor—Bare. But all the time I'se been a-  
climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners, And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light. So boy, don't you turn back. Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard. Don't you fall now—For I'se still goin', honey,  
I'se still climbin', And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. -- Langston Hughes

The epigraph is conjoined with my research as an African American female Practical Theologian; it has assisted me in the construction of my disputation against the hyper-pathologization of Black male youth at the hands of America's justice system, and its educational system by suggesting that the Black mothers written about in this research are sources of life-giving wisdom to Black youth. Similar to the Black mother in Langston Hughes poem above, Black mother's are teaching Black male youth spiritual tools to resist societal violence in America. They are teaching spiritual resilience instead of "settin' down on the steps 'Cause [they] finds its kinder hard." In the above epigraph, Langston Hughes writes about a Black mother conversing with her Black son about society's violence against her, and how she has remained resilient. She says, "I'se been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, and turnin corners...And sometimes goin' in the dark Where there ain't been no light." A segment of the knowledge shared by Black women, grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunties, cousins, and female fictive kin like church moms unfold in religious spaces, kitchens, and front porches alike. I can attest to the wisdom given by Black women containing stories, myths, sacred scripture (Quran and the Holy Bible), Hip-Hop lyrics and a plethora of life-lessons which are passed on to Black youth to aid their spiritual resilience. Angela "Buddy" Jackson is my older

sister and one of the main Black women who reared me, and introduced me to Hip Hop music as a tool of spiritual resilience.

Practical theologians often write about “lived experiences” being at the heart of their theological convictions, rather than theoretical assumptions taking precedence. My coming of age as an African-American female in the inner-city housing projects describes my lived reality. My story explains how I fell in love with Hip-Hop culture and found practical theology as a framework within which to investigate the religious dimensions of Hip-Hop culture as a way of life.

I was born during one of the biggest drug surges, during the crack cocaine epidemic, between 1984 and 1990, when this drug spread across American cities, including Los Angeles and my own Atlanta neighborhood. The demon of Crack Cocaine had consumed my father. I grew up in government housing projects in Atlanta, Georgia, the fifth of seven siblings and at the age of five, lost my father. He was murdered in our housing projects streets by a gang made up of the family members of a man with whom my father had a horribly violent dispute earlier that day. After his death, my mother was severely depressed and had to work even more hours to support us. My sister Angela, a high school student at the time, was burdened with the herculean feat of parenting the four of us, while my other two sisters were out the house. Angela, (nicknamed Buddy), is my third oldest sister who became our mother figure. I worshiped her. Buddy was the baddest girl walking, and I always followed her around because she was smart, cool and worked hard to buy her own stuff – like the latest clothes and shoes – and that blue Honda Civic we rode in in the '90s. Lining her bedroom walls were posters of Hip-Hop artists like Big Daddy Kane and Chris Cross; she blasted Rap music and created routines with friends and family members. The love I have for my sister and her engagement



with Hip-Hop culture was imprinted upon my heart and intellect. It encouraged me to want to grow up fast, so I too could create dances and show them off at house parties and clubs, as Buddy and her friends often did. Buddy committed suicide during my last year of coursework at Claremont School of Theology in 2012.

## INTRODUCTION

### BLACK CHURCHES AND BLACK MASJIDS, CREATING ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SPACES AND SACRED INCUBATION

#### Being “The Problem”

In his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois discusses continually being asked by onlookers, “How does it feel to be [the] problem?”<sup>2</sup> In this very politically charged era of 2018 America, this question is still being asked of everyday African Americans. Specifically, this research project focuses upon the societal, educational, and religious experiences of African American male youth who are religiously affiliated, struggling with racialized harassment, criminalization, and the fear of government sanctioned lynching's based on the color of their skin.<sup>3 4 5 6</sup> Dubois writes in 1903, “This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.”<sup>7</sup> The problem being studied is the hyper-pathologization of African American male youth throughout American educational institutions primarily due to their skin color.<sup>8 9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 2014), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Daniella Silva, “White Texas Police Officer Found Guilty of Murder For Fatally Shooting Black Teen in Car,” accessed Sept 25, 2018, [www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/ncna904166](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/ncna904166).

<sup>4</sup> “Chicago Police Officer Faces Trial in Shooting of Black Teen,” *The Associated Press*, September 15, 2018, <https://wtop.com/national/2018/09/chicago-police-officer-faces-trial-in-shooting-of-black-teen/>.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Burns and Becca J. G. Godwin, “Cops Release Video in Teen’s Killing Days after His High School Graduation,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.ajc.com/news/crime-law/breaking-year-old-killed-northwest-atlanta-shooting/KfIpaEdJ0ryMdqRTTovbVL/>.

<sup>6</sup> “52 Black Men and Boys Killed by Police,” *News One*, December 15, 2018, <https://newsone.com/playlist/black-men-youths-who-were-killed-by-police/>.

<sup>7</sup> DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Tyrone C. Howard, Terry K. Flenbaugh, and Clarence L. Terry, “Black Males, Social Imagery, and the Disruption of Pathological Identities: Implications for Research and Teaching,” *Educational Foundations* 26 (2012): 85–102.

<sup>9</sup> Vickie M. Mays, Susan D. Cochran, and Namdi W. Barnes, “Race, Race-Based Discrimination, and Health Outcomes Among African Americans,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 58 (2007): 201–25, doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190212.

I put forward for consideration that Du Bois' work speaks prophetically in its ability to resonate not only with discourse surrounding the color-line of 1903 but also with America's present-day political/social climate. Black American citizens are currently experiencing overt violent, racist, xenophobic, sexist, patriarchal actions in today's political/social climate. These violent displays of white rage against people of color have become increasingly common, and it is being validated by the President of the United States of America in his speeches to the nation.<sup>101112131415</sup> After the 2016 American Presidential election, the language and actions of the President of the United States of America, continued to accommodate and bolster the views of the conservative alt-right and neo-Nazis.<sup>1617</sup> This political/social climate has led to overtly insidious violent racist, homophobic, and misogynistic actions against Black male and female bodies.<sup>18 19 20 21 22 23 24 2526</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Here Are 10 Times President Trump's Comments Have Been Called Racist." *USA TODAY*. Accessed January 25, 2019. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/08/14/times-president-trump-comments-called-racist/985438002/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Bernie Sanders Calls Trump Racist, Sexist, Homophobic and Xenophobic" - *Axios*. Accessed January 25, 2019. <https://www.axios.com/bernie-sanders-donald-trump-racist-sexist-homophobic-6da0fbe8-695a-492d-883d-865fdb96af6c.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Tristan Lejeune, "CNN's Baldwin Rips Trump's 'Pocahontas' Insult: 'It Is Not Just Sexist, It Is Racist.'" *TheHill*, July 6, 2018. <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/395889-cnns-baldwin-rips-trumps-pocahontas-insult-it-is-not-just-sexist-it-is-racist>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Lydia O'Connor, and Daniel Marans, "Here Are 16 Examples of Donald Trump Being Racist." *Huffington Post*, December 13, 2016, sec. Politics. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/president-donald-trump-racist-examples\\_us\\_584f2ccae4b0bd9c3dfe5566](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/president-donald-trump-racist-examples_us_584f2ccae4b0bd9c3dfe5566).

<sup>15</sup> "'Shithole' and Other Racist Things Trump Has Said — So Far" *Los Angeles Times*. Accessed January 25, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-trump-racism-remarks-20180111-htmlstory.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Jacobs, "Research Finds That Racism, Sexism, and Status Fears Drove Trump Voters." *Pacific Standard*. Accessed January 25, 2019. <https://psmag.com/news/research-finds-that-racism-sexism-and-status-fears-drove-trump-voters>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "High School Dance Teacher Tells Black Teen That Her Skin Color Clashes With the Uniforms – She Is Suing!" *BlackNews.com*, January 21, 2019. <http://www.blacknews.com/news/high-school-dance-teacher-tells-black-teen-camille-sturdivant-skin-color-clashes-uniforms/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Daycare Worker Caught on Video Pulling Young Black Girl's Hair, Forcing Her to Eat." Accessed January 25, 2019. <http://www.blacknews.com/news/texas-my-little-playhouse-daycare-worker-caught-on-video-pulling-young-black-girls-hair/>.

Du Bois described how anti-Black discriminatory practices target and systemically disenfranchise African Americans. I utilize Du Bois work, *The Souls of Black Folks* as a lens and theoretical framework for my argument detailing racially motivated attacks on African American communities, specifically religious, African American male youth. The following is an illustration of the strategic method in which, “White people are weaponizing the police against Blacks for occupying public places.”<sup>27</sup> Feminista Jones is an African American female social worker, writer, and Black feminist blogger describes this ‘new’ anti-Black discrimination technique as, “... what seems to be the latest fad sweeping the nation: White people calling the authorities to ‘help’ them survive sharing public spaces with Black people.”<sup>28</sup>

On April 12, 2018, a white Starbucks manager in Philadelphia called the police on two African American males sitting at a table. This manager wished to have them removed because

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<sup>20</sup> Jayme S. Ganey, “Gov. Ron ‘Monkey It Up’ DeSantis’ Pick for Secretary of State Resigns Amid Blackface photo Backlash” *DiversityInc*, January 24, 2019. <https://www.diversityinc.com/Organizational-Misbehavior/florida-gov-ron-desantis-pick-for-secretary-of-state-resigns-amid-blackface-photo-backlash>.

<sup>21</sup> Keka Araujo, “White Supremacist Pleads Guilty to Murder of Elderly Black Man in NYC.” *DiversityInc*, January 24, 2019. <https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/white-supremacist-pleads-guilty-murder>.

<sup>22</sup> Jayme S. Ganey, “Man Who Pulled Gun on Black Teens Could Face Hate Crime” - *DiversityInc*. Accessed January 25, 2019. <https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/man-pulled-gun-on-teens-faces-hate-crime>.

<sup>23</sup> Jayme S. Ganey, “Van Dyke’s Daughter Asks the Judge To Bring her Dad Home; Laquan McDonald’s Family Asks, on his Behalf, Why Should Van Dyke Be Free?” *DiversityInc*, January 23, 2019. <https://www.diversityinc.com/Organizational-Misbehavior/jason-van-dyke-given-leniency>.

<sup>24</sup> Jayme S. Ganey, “White Man Pulled Gun On Black Teens And Yells Racial Slurs” - *DiversityInc*. - Accessed January 25, 2019. [https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/white-man-pulls-gun-black-teens-in-miami-on-mlk-day?utm\\_source=WhatCounts&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=wc-ip%200122](https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/white-man-pulls-gun-black-teens-in-miami-on-mlk-day?utm_source=WhatCounts&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=wc-ip%200122).

<sup>25</sup> Keka Araujo, “Two Students Leave University of Oklahoma after Blackface Video Surfaces.” *DiversityInc*, January 22, 2019. <https://www.diversityinc.com/Organizational-Misbehavior/university-of-oklahoma-student-blackface>.

<sup>26</sup> Keka Araujo, “Black Student Subjected to Racial Discrimination by her Coach Sues School District.” - *DiversityInc*. Accessed January 25, 2019. [https://www.diversityinc.com/Organizational-Misbehavior/black-student-subjected-to-coachs-racial-abuse-sues-for-discrimination-in-kansas?utm\\_source=WhatCounts&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=1%20DI%20Newsletter%20Saturday%200119](https://www.diversityinc.com/Organizational-Misbehavior/black-student-subjected-to-coachs-racial-abuse-sues-for-discrimination-in-kansas?utm_source=WhatCounts&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=1%20DI%20Newsletter%20Saturday%200119).

<sup>27</sup> Feminista Jones, “Breathing While Black.” *Essence*, September 2018, 119.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

they had not made a purchase. The two Black men were escorted out of the establishment in handcuffs by Philadelphia police officers. The men later reported they were merely awaiting the arrival of their business partner for a joint meeting.

This miscarriage of justice caused a strong of backlash across America, in which social activists and scholars responded with anger and outrage on internet boards. Communities all over America called for protest and policy changes from Starbucks for criminalizing Black bodies in public spaces. Notable organized action has been seen in the African Methodist Episcopal Church,<sup>29</sup> the denomination in which I conducted a portion of my research. The AME Church organized round table discussions with white churches to address the pathologization and criminalization of Black bodies and to suggest adequate responses and involvement from other religious communities.

This study will present the unique perspective of a Black, female religious educator who seeks to provide liberative pedagogies for Black youth. It will argue that a hyper-pathology fuels negative media representations which in turn problematically become internalized by the wider society which then establishes public policies, educational procedures, economic plans and political agendas based on negative and erroneous guidelines.<sup>30</sup> This research problem uncovers years of race-based discrimination and

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<sup>29</sup> Othal Hawthorne Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*. (Memphis, TN: CME Publishing House, 1996), 87-89. Lakey writes concerning AME Church being the first major independent Black Methodist denomination on American soil. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded as a religious movement among Blacks of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York in the beginning of the nineteenth century. These Black Methodists sought full ministerial rights and privileges which were denied to black preachers by white members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Additionally, Othal Hawthorne Lakey writes that although many Blacks were part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the primary assumption held in the white imagination was that Blacks were inferior to whites. These racial tensions started the uprising of Black ministers who wanted racist polity to match the pronouncements that were made by Methodist Episcopal leaders who claimed to denounce slavery. Eric C. Lincoln writes that the construction “of Black churches like the African Methodist Episcopal Church was the response of Black Americans to both the spiritual and the political alienation they suffered.”

<sup>30</sup> Howard, Flenbaugh, Terry, “Black Males, Social Imagery,” 4.

historically constructed knowledge that are sustained and reified by dominant cultural media representations.<sup>31</sup> African American males are thus depicted as “inhumane savages, brutes, pimps, gangsters, lazy, docile, hyper sexed, law-breaking slicksters who were not to be trusted.”<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon of hyper-pathologization of African American male youth ultimately results in the dehumanization or sub-humanization of this population; furthermore, this results in the criminalization<sup>33 34 35</sup> and systemic annihilation of this community.

Professor of science and sociology, David Bloor describes the method by which social imagery and negative stereotypes become “an integral part of a population’s thinking.”<sup>36</sup> More importantly, Bloor concludes that societal images and stereotypes *do* become influential and ingrained in group psyches. This research interrogates the disturbing, discriminatory representations of African American males, which have become grounds for policies throughout society.

As an unfortunate result, African Americans have for centuries been disenfranchised and demonized by dominant ideologies and pathologies that have been incorporated into U.S.

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<sup>31</sup> Janet Dewart Bell and Eleni Delimpaltadaki Janis, “Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys,” *The Opportunity Agenda* ed. Jill Bailin, Judi Lerman, and Loren Siegel (New York: Opportunity Agenda, 2011), <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Media-Impact-onLives-of-Black-Men-and-Boys-OppAgenda.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry, “Black Males, Social Imagery,” 89.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Edelman, “How Poverty Became a Crime in America” *The Guardian*, November 6, 2017, Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/06/how-poverty-became-crime-america>.

<sup>34</sup> “‘Not in It for Justice’ How California’s Pretrial Detention and Bail System Unfairly Punishes Poor People,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 11, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/04/11/not-it-justice/how-californias-pretrial-detention-and-bail-system-unfairly>.

<sup>35</sup> Ram Subramanian, Ruth Delaney, Stephen Roberts, Nancy Fishman, and Peggy McGarry. “Incarceration’s Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America,” *PDF*, 2015, 56, <http://www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/incarcerations-front-door-report.pdf>. Accessed Nov. 15, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Howard, Flenbaugh, Terry, “Black Males, Social Imagery,” 85.

law.<sup>37</sup> The outcomes found in this nation's education sector clearly reveal how Black male youth are problematically pathologized and criminalized.<sup>38 39</sup> Here are a few examples of the ways in which dominate ideologies and pathologies become law and how they affect African American communities. California-elected officials have sponsored laws that criminalize those who are alleged gang members by creating and enforcing "enhancement" laws.<sup>40</sup> These laws created the ruse of the state "being tough on crime." Additionally, California legislatures implemented a State Task force on Youth Gang Violence in 1984.<sup>41</sup> This allowed government officials to identify inner city youth who were believed to be gang affiliates, and have them placed on a watch list.<sup>42</sup> These laws allowed law enforcement officers to identify people who they think may be gang members to be criminalized twice after a single offense. For example, the "sentence enhancements [laws] add fixed amounts of extra time to standard sentences."<sup>43</sup> This enhancement legislation was purportedly endorsed as a state law because it was supposed to prevent possible gang-members from committing crimes by keeping them incarcerated longer, thereby protecting the law-abiding citizens. However, non-gang affiliates who are arrested for similar offenses would only be charged with the one offense committed and receive

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<sup>37</sup> Brent Staples, "The Racist Origins of Felon Disenfranchisement," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2014, Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/opinion/the-racist-origins-of-felon-disenfranchisement.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Nekima Levy-Pounds, "The Crisis Facing Black Boys in Minneapolis Public Schools," *Star Tribune*, July 2, 2014, <http://www.startribune.com/the-crisis-facing-black-boys-in-minneapolis-public-schools/265518781/>.

<sup>39</sup> Alma Stevenson, and Sabrina Ross, "Starting Young: Emergent Black Masculinity and Early Literacy," *Journal of African American Males in Education* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 78, <http://journalofafricanamericanmales.com/issues/vol6no1/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, Second edition. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 107-08.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

no sentence enhancements.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the alleged gang member would be charged with the offense, and charged with “being a gang member who had committed the offense.”<sup>45</sup> Ruth Wilson, Associate Professor of Geography and the Director of the Program in American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, documents how California legislatures ran enforcement campaigns that targeted alleged gang members, which mostly disproportionately impacted African Americans, and Latinos in California. Wilson also emphasizes the fact that if Los Angeles County prosecutors did not embrace these new policies, they would be ejected from their office.<sup>46</sup>

Society’s racist practices include placing Black youth in special education classes, because they are categorized as “educable mentally retarded.”<sup>47</sup> With no real effort to understand their attitudes, mindsets, or cultural situations, Black students receive given low literacy scores<sup>48</sup> and are stereotypically diagnosed with serious emotional disorders.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Black youth are placed within educational environments that require from them coping and survival skills, rather than minds eagerly open to engage new ideas.<sup>50</sup> Today, a host of these same social ills and punitive legal instruments continue to negate the equal rights of Black people, in general, and Black youth, in particular. These systematic and institutionalized forms of bias and the resulting larger habitus of hyper-pathologization exist largely unaddressed by white educators and the political elite today. Not only has this inequality not been remedied,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry, “Black Males, Social Imagery,” 4.

<sup>48</sup> Stevenson and Ross, “Starting Young,” 75.

<sup>49</sup> Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry, “Black Males, Social Imagery,” 4

<sup>50</sup> Stevenson and Ross, “Starting Young,” 77.



but it is my argument that unequal treatment has expanded into even more arenas of American culture, and has been sanctioned by government authorities.

For example, institutions such as the American justice and educational systems are producers and enforcers of “tough on crime” political campaigns<sup>51</sup> that produce long-term intergenerational and systemic injury and harm.<sup>52,53,54,55,56</sup> These political agendas, more often than not, result in “war on drugs” policies which primarily disenfranchise Black communities mostly, and the hardest.<sup>57</sup> It is clear that unabated resistance to the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment continues to undermine the spirit and force of the legal and moral rightness of abolition and emancipation.<sup>58</sup> Indeed not only do young Black men face the entrenchment of “separate but equal” policies but they are daily faced by actual attempts to nullify their status under the law as full and equal citizens.<sup>59,60</sup> As a direct result of these policies Blacks receive harsher

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<sup>51</sup> Jen Manion, “When White Liberals (and Black Elites) Make Things Worse: A Historical Perspective on Language and the Criminalization of African Americans,” *Guernica: A Magazine of Global Arts and Politics*, accessed September 16, 2018, <https://www.guernicamag.com/jen-manion-when-white-liberals-and-black-elites-make-things-worse/https://www.guernicamag.com/jen-manion-when-white-liberals-and-black-elites-make-things-worse/>.

<sup>52</sup> Damien M. Sojoyner, *First Strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 33.

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Monique Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2016).

<sup>57</sup> Jesse Wegman, “The Injustice of Marijuana Arrests,” *New York Times*, accessed September 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/29/opinion/high-time-the-injustice-of-marijuana-arrests.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Neal Allen, “The Limits of Emancipation: Black Americans and White Southern Dominance of American Politics From the Founding to the Twenty-First Century,” in *Challenging the Legacies of Racial Resentment: Black Health Activism, Educational Justice, and Legislative Leadership*, eds. Julia Jordan-Zachery and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (New York: Routledge, 2017), 111.

<sup>59</sup> Albert Samuels, “All But Overturned: America’s Nullification of Brown v. Board of Education” (2014 *National Conference of Black Political Scientists* (NCOBPS) Annual Meeting, Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2013), 38, <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2350799>.

sentences than counterparts— for the same crimes. For example, regarding possession and use of marijuana, <sup>61</sup> African Americans receive harsh prison sentences for this, while whites receive a lighter or no sentence, despite the fact that whites own a disproportionate amount of marijuana dispensaries and smoke more marijuana than Blacks.<sup>62,63</sup> In fact, Black people are more likely to be arrested for marijuana use, and charged with a felony for this nonviolent offense, which results in their being denied jobs, car loans, housing, and voting privileges<sup>64 65</sup>

After incarceration, religious hubs within Black communities continue to create avenues for members who need to find jobs, have records expunged, register to vote, learn basic computer literacy skills, buy healthy food, find housing etc. In fact, studying Black religious communities continues to be central to understanding both the external negative forces shaping young African American lives and the community practices of resiliency that strive to protect them.

The narratives created by educational systems maintain that Black children are more likely to misbehave than white children.<sup>66</sup> Black boys are three-times more likely to be expelled from school than white boys.<sup>67</sup> Black girls are four times more likely to be suspended from school than white girls. In 2006, Black girls represent 43 percent of out-of-school

<sup>60</sup> Marc Mauer, "Racial Impact Statements as a Means of Reducing Unwarranted Sentencing Disparities," *Ohio St. J. Crim. L.* 5 (2007): 19.

<sup>61</sup> Theodore R. Curry, and Guadalupe Corral-Camacho, "Sentencing Young Minority Males for Drug Offenses: Testing for Conditional Effects Between Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Age During the US War on Drugs," *Punishment & Society* 10.3 (2008): 253-276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474508090231>.

<sup>62</sup> Wegman.

<sup>63</sup> Ojmarrh Mitchell and Michael S. Caudy, "Examining Racial Disparities in Drug Arrests," *Justice Quarterly* 32.2 (2015): 288-313.

<sup>64</sup> Wegman.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kevin O'Neal Cockley, "What It Means To Be Black in the American Educational System," *The Conversation*, accessed September 25, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/what-it-means-to-be-black-in-the-american-educational-system-63576>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

suspensions.<sup>68</sup> Even though Black youth are punished at higher rates for engaging in the same behaviors as unpunished white children, some continue to deny that racial disparities exist. Punishment has become the signature index of the venomous treatment to which Black youth are subjected; what they learn most consistently are not classrooms lessons about specific content but that they are unwanted in this society and identified as a social threat.

Not only are African American boys treated in a discriminatory fashion, but Black girls are too. In *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, (2016) Monique Morris documents and analyzes how young Black school girls are pathologized and criminalized and the far-reaching impact of these policies and practices. It is important to note that Morris calls for a conscious disruption of these deliberate pathways to delinquency created by educators' behaviors toward Black girls. These attitudes, behaviors, and the policies that reinforce them are cyclical in nature and have long-term and devastating impacts on Black family systems.<sup>69</sup> She concludes her statistical findings with the statement, "still the racial disparities remain."<sup>70</sup> Damien Sojoyner's research on the extension of carceral attitudes, behaviors, and policies to the school house echoes Morris by making a more ominous conclusion—it is not that schools are pushing Black children out of school and into juvenile facilities and prisons but rather than the school is simply another site of punishment, detention, and a form of incarceration.<sup>71</sup> Sojoyner's discussion of religious institutions and schools points to both the spaces and practices of confinement and pathologization and the ways in which Black people draw extensively on religious sites to undo these experiences of violence.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Morris, 68.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>71</sup> Sojoyner, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

These are merely two examples of the impact of white supremacy on America's educational institutions and justice systems and their far-reaching implications for Black social, familial, and religious life today. This is precisely why the very existence of Black boys and girls as well as their deliberate and intentional survival continues to be an act of moral courage and an example of unique forms of spiritual development.<sup>7374</sup>

It is widely understood by experts in the field of Black masculinity studies, that hyper-masculine codes of conduct enacted by school-age Black youth,<sup>75</sup> exist as a response to the hyper-pathologization that is imposed on them through prolonged, multi-pronged negative social imagery.

### **How are Religious Male African American Youth Using Hip Hop and Black Mother's Wisdom and Care?**

#### **Hypothesis/ Thesis Being Argued**

I study two communities that offer alternative narratives to historical and contemporary negative social imagery of Black male youth. They are: African American Christians of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in San Bernadino County, and a African American mosque in South Los Angeles. In both communities I find that Black male youth are deeply involved in Hip Hop music and culture as chosen sites of artistic expression. I explore how their religious devotion and hip hop as their mode of artistic expression operate as an act of

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<sup>73</sup> Courage in the Civil Rights Movement: A Resource for Educators, developed 2014 by the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Hotel, Memphis Tennessee.  
<https://www.speakcdn.com/assets/2417/COURAGE.pdf> accessed January 28, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Maureen E. Markey, "Natural Law, Positive Law, and Conflicting Social Norms in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*" unpublished paper, 2009, 74.

<sup>75</sup> Howard, Flenbaugh, Terry, "Black Males, Social Imagery," 4.

political resistance<sup>76</sup> and spiritual resilience<sup>77 78</sup> to the negative social imagery attached to being young, Black and male. My research assesses how the sheer existence of the youth of these two communities and their religious and artistic practices allow them to craft alternative narratives about themselves. Further, it stands to reason that the relationship between their religious devotion and their artistic expression is a fundamental way for them to resist internalizing hyper-pathologization. This concept of “the sheer existence” as itself being a way out of hyper-pathologization emerges from the scholarship of prolific writer and Black youth political activist Sonia Sanchez: “The Black artist is dangerous. Black art controls the ‘Negro’s’ reality, negates negative influences, and creates positive images.”<sup>79</sup> Sonia Sanchez’s political commentary and creative writing were largely produced as part of the flowering of the Black Arts Movement (1965-1976),<sup>80 81 82 83 84</sup> a youth-focused artistic mobilization and cultural turning point. It anticipated and pre-dated much of the cultural studies scholarship on Black masculinity, Black childhood studies, and research on youth and hip hop. Not only do all the historiographies of the Black Arts Movement foreground the flourishing of expressive arts in

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<sup>76</sup> Hannah Giorgis, “Black Art I Dangerous, Because It Marries the Personal and Political,” *The Guardian*, last modified February 22, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/22/black-art-dangerous-personal-political>.

<sup>77</sup> Josef Sorett, “‘Believe Me, This Pimp Game Is Very Religious’: Toward a Religious History of Hip Hop,” *Culture and Religion* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610902786288>.

<sup>78</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, ed. *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*. First Printing. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Giorgis.

<sup>80</sup> “Poetry of the Black Arts Movement,” Washington University in St. Louis University Library, accessed September 29, 2018, <https://libguides.wustl.edu/poetry-bam/timeline>

<sup>81</sup> “1946-1966: from Civil Rights to Black Power The Black Arts Movement,” PBS SoCal *This Far By Faith*, accessed September 16, 2018, [https://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey\\_4/p\\_8.html](https://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey_4/p_8.html).

<sup>82</sup> “Kaluma ya Salaam,” Historical Overviews of The Black Arts Movement, accessed Sept 20, 2018, <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/blackarts/historical.htm>.

<sup>83</sup> Hannah Foster, “The Black Arts Movement (1965-1975),” *BlackPast.Org*, accessed September 16, 2018, <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/black-arts-movement-1965-1975>.

<sup>84</sup> “Black Arts Movement” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed September 17, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Arts-movement>.

Black communities, but they deliberately focus the attention of these communities on challenging the plague of hyper-pathologization that targets young Black people. When James Brown sang “I’m Black and I’m proud” and Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone sang “Young, gifted and Black” their audiences were young Black people who had not only suffered under structural containment and institutionalized cruelty, but also endured devalued and caricatured as unwanted. The Black Arts Movement, to which Sonia Sanchez, was a key artistic contributor, was a movement to advance the future of young Black people. When Sanchez states that the Black artist is dangerous, she was seeking to encourage and motivate young Black people to see their gifts of artistic expression as more powerful than a world that sought to tell them they were meaningless.

One might even note the different forms of danger that Sanchez was wrestling with in the quotation. On the one hand, hyper-pathologization seeks to control and manage the existence of young Black people because the dominant society fears them as potential rioters and social rebels. On the other hand, Sanchez is harkening back to artist and poet Langston Hughes who wrote his poem “What Happens to a Dream Deferred?” to explain that the real danger is in young Black people realizing their artistic gifts and using them to turn their backs on hyper-pathologization and other social norms of control and detention. Young Black youth are dangerous, suggests Sanchez, because they are gifted with insight and foresight and an uncanny capacity for survival that the white establishment had not anticipated. Black Americans do not wish to destroy the society. But, if society, as we know it today, must end in order for them to live and have their being in the world, then so be it. In my work, I follow Sanchez and the analytic frameworks offered by those like her to describe and analyze the operations of alternative self-making among young Black religious people. Like Sanchez, I too

argue that Black existence is itself a form of art which consistently rebels against oppressive institutions and ideologies.<sup>85</sup> These youths use the sacred knowledge of spiritual teachings from their places of worship, Hip Hop lyrics, and Black matriarchal wisdom to combat social death.<sup>86</sup>

These religiously connected and deeply spiritually devoted youth excavate the tools available to them and within their control to build themselves and their communities. These tools must be understood, I insist, to better understand the sources of resilience for Black youth as they are inundated by oppression.

I research the spiritual practice of recitation of their sacred text and the engagement of their bodies with Hip Hop music as intentional spiritual practices. In this way, their bodies are archival spaces through which the practice of recitation of sacred texts (both Hip Hop texts and religious canons, the Quran and Bible) become the site where spiritual resistance happens. Their young Black bodies are archival spaces where pain is experienced at the hands of institutional forms of racism,<sup>87</sup> demonization and ostracism; simultaneously, their bodies are archival spaces where joy is experienced as the reciting and the retelling of their own communal stories that unfold, with care, at the hands of their religious communities.

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<sup>85</sup> Paul Butler, "US Justice Is Built To Humiliate and Oppress Black Men. It Starts with the Chokehold..." *The Guardian*, August 11, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/11/chokehold-police-black-men-paul-butler-race-america>.

<sup>86</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 38-39. Patterson writes of the different stages of social death for a slave. One of the phases being social negation of their being, and the slave being introduced to his/her community as a non-being. I am correlating this treatment of a slave with the hyper-pathology of African American males in the U.S. educational and health systems. Patterson claims the slave is a perpetual "domestic enemy" to the state. Similarly, African American youth are perpetually being murdered by the state. Patterson argues that the slave could not belong because he was the product of an alien culture. Similarly, Black youth are treated as subhuman and foreign bodies that do not belong in the U.S.

<sup>87</sup> Lamees El-Sadek, "Empowering Our Black Boys," *Huffington Post*, April 15, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lamees-elsadek/black-youth-education\\_b\\_1426912.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lamees-elsadek/black-youth-education_b_1426912.html).

I observe the spiritual practice of listening to, reciting, and engaging the body, and the ways in which this cultivates resilience when participating in Hip Hop. Unlike much of the scholarship on Black males that has reinforced Black heteropatriarchy<sup>88</sup> and the need for stern Black male adult figures to teach and instill normative masculine authoritarian identities, I declare that Black boys are taught to use their bodies as archival spaces through the teachings of Black women in their communities<sup>89</sup> (mothers, grandmothers, nannas, aunties, godmothers and other fictive matriarchal kin); I reason that not only are Hip Hop text and religious text used for spiritual resilience, but the teachings of the women in the community are also used as tools of resistance against oppression. Such tools encourage the development and cultivation of inner narratives about self-worth, belonging, and self-care. These three spaces-- Hip Hop music, religious study, and Black women's proverbs and caretaking-- remind the young males I interviewed of their intrinsic value and undercut the institutionalized violence, systematic mockery, and tragic expectations that too often assail them. I have noticed among Black women in the African and American communities that those who shape the values of these religious youths are keepers of wisdom sayings and folk traditions that provide spiritual resilience.<sup>90</sup> These keepers of wisdom act as the primary teachers within religious communities.<sup>91</sup>

When I write that their bodies are archives, I am explaining that their mouths, ears, minds, and spirits have a spiritually retentive function. These functions were used to absorb the

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<sup>88</sup> Zenzele Isoke, *Urban Black Women and the Politics of Resistance* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>89</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey, *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 59.

<sup>90</sup> Andrea O'Reilly, *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 12, 37, 26.

<sup>91</sup> Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women. . . : Black Women's Experience And Womanist Culture In Church And Community* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 66.



wisdom of the matriarchal kin. What they retain from the past they share through the practice of oral recitation of different Hip Hop, Biblical and Qur'anic texts. These same tools are used to absorb the wisdom of the matriarchal kin.

In this research project, I study both the process of building spiritual resilience and the content of the spiritual ideas and principles that these young males retain. I ask about the ways that these ideas and principles show up in their everyday lives and how they use these ideas and principles to respond to institutionalized hyper-pathologization. I have designed this research project in a way that explores and gives credence to the wisdom that these young people are developing. As Black youth participating in religious education discover the transmission of matriarchal knowledge, their bodies become the methodology for reciting their way to freedom. Their Black bodies have the capacity to tell the history of their struggle and this is what I have come to call “devotion in practice.”

### **W. E. B. Du Bois, The A.M.E. Church, and Making African Americans Sacred**

*The Soul of Black Folks* (1903) is remembered as one of the earliest texts by the significant historian and philosopher W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) whose life work tirelessly sought out strategies to resist the relentless dehumanization and criminalization of Black people in the American South. Du Bois adamantly opposed the negative perceptions of Black people as “other” and “inferior” to their white counterparts through his scholarship and social activism. He championed equal rights for the Black community in America. As a Harvard trained sociologist of religion, Du Bois studied the Church, one of the cultural centers where Black people in America, facing the most horrendous traumas and loss to their humanity,

sought refuge. Du Bois spent time in Black churches observing spiritual practices and pedagogical methods.<sup>92</sup> Du Bois found that church membership and participation enabled Black people to resist the unspeakable atrocities they suffered, including government sanctioned violence against their bodies and spirits, the criminalization of their Blackness and their imposed poverty. Du Bois witnessed, documented, and analyzed “counter-spaces”<sup>93 94 95</sup> where Black people practiced expressions of African American Christianity to learn how in the midst of extreme hostility the Black body is taught to be a tool of resistance. When Du Bois documented the “shouting frenzy,” “black preaching,” and forms of ecstatic “music” he was observing the pedagogical methods transmitted within Black communities to make the Black body the first and *perhaps the primary* sacred space. Du Bois witnessed *how* the Black body could be read as text, and interpreted as a tool of spiritual resilience.<sup>96</sup> While observing Black Christian worship experiences, Du Bois learned that the body *is* taught to be an archival space for developing spiritual resilience in their religious and spiritual rhapsodies.<sup>97</sup> Du Bois believed the “African Methodist Episcopal Church of America was the most remarkable product of American Negro civilization.”<sup>98</sup> He also believed the Black church would be a place of potential political awakening and social betterment.<sup>99</sup> Following Du Bois, the transformation of the Black church into a site of protection and social pedagogy continues today as conditions

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<sup>92</sup> DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Joni Schwartz, “Classrooms of Spatial Justice: Counter-Spaces and Young Men of Color in a GED Program,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 64.2 (2014): 110-127.

<sup>94</sup> Dorinda J. Carter, “Why the Black Kids Sit Together at the Stairs: The Role of Identity-Affirming Counter-Spaces in a Predominantly White High School,” *The Journal of Negro Education* (2007): 542-554.

<sup>95</sup> Susana Muñoz, Michelle M. Espino, and Rene Antrop-Gonzalez, “Creating Counter-Spaces of Resistance and Sanctuaries of Learning and Teaching: An Analysis of Freedom University,” *Teachers College Record* 116.7 (2014): 1-32.

<sup>96</sup> DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 116.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Zuckerman, *Du Bois on Religion*, 9.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

around the hyper-pathologization of young Black people continue to produce dehumanization and injury, both individual and communal.

In Du Bois time, the 14th Amendment (1868)<sup>100</sup> and the national and regional debates around it and the legacies of its enforcement deformed basic understandings of equal rights that were still not afforded to Black people in the aftermath of the Civil War.

### *African American Islam and the Norms of African American Life*

While the classroom and criminal justice system are two sites of harm and injury, African American religious communities (Christian and Islamic) produce creative, life-sustaining, and life-giving programs. They do a far better job at affirming Black people than does the dominant society.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is probably the case that Du Bois has peers in the study of African American Islam, peers who have illustrated the centrality of that religious force in Black communities as a means for responding to and protecting against racial domination and violence.<sup>101 102 103 104 105</sup>

<sup>106 107 108 109 110</sup> Certainly given the exacting toll that American racism has taken on the lives and

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<sup>100</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois The Fight for Equality and the American Century 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt & Company LLC, 2000), 27.

<sup>101</sup> Herbert Berg, "Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context: The Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, and the American Society of Muslims," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73.3 (2005): 685-703.

<sup>102</sup> Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 153.

<sup>103</sup> "African American Muslims in Early America" *The National Museum of African American History and Culture Smithsonian Museum*, accessed September 16, 2018, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/collection/african-muslims-early-america>.

<sup>104</sup> Lewis V. Baldwin and Amiri Yasin Al-Hadid, *Between Cross and Crescent: Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Malcolm and Martin* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 55.

<sup>105</sup> Michael A. Gomez, "Muslims in Early America," *The Journal of Southern History* 60.4 (1994): 671-710.

<sup>106</sup> Amir Nashid Ali Muhammad, *Muslims in America*, (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2001), 75.

<sup>107</sup> Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam*, (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 10-11.

possibilities of Black people in this country, we would expect that Islam would also have been called upon to create ritual and social mechanisms to protect its African American adherents from and re-humanize them after the effects of pathologization. Key areas of de-pathologization for which the Islamic community has distinguished itself include dietary rules, caretaking of HIV/AIDS survivors, and rehabilitating survivors of the prison industrial complex. One of the first African American religious communities to provide public resources and to get involved in an AIDS project was the African American Muslim community, known as the Nation of Islam. Additionally under Minister Louis Farrakhan's leadership the Nation of Islam introduced alternative community policing systems that could address the needs for personal safety in Black communities that were riddled with violence, drug abuse, and under heavy state surveillance. Author Emmanuel Mauleón writes that Black Muslim bodies are policed twice. In the current political climate represented by white nationalistic attitudes,<sup>111</sup> Black Muslims are policed first as a result of their skin color, and secondly for their religious affiliation. Yet in that hostile climate, state-sanctioned violence has often been reduced in Black communities as a direct result of African American Muslim community intervention.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 29-30, 155.

<sup>109</sup> Ula Yvette Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 7-8, 11, 33.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 4, 6, 12.

<sup>111</sup> Emmanuel Mauleón, "Black Twice: Policing Black Muslim Identities by Emmanuel Mauleón," *UCLA Law Review*, 65. 1326 (2018): 1328-1390, <https://www.uclalawreview.org/black-twice-policing-black-muslim-identities/>.

<sup>112</sup> Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 170. Dr. McCloud is Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Islamic World Studies program at DePaul University.

While dwelling in both inner cities and suburbs in America, Black people often encounter African American expressions<sup>113</sup> of Islamic theological tenets and general guidelines for Muslim living without formally obtaining an Islamic education, (i.e. attending the mosque, reading the Qur'an, having access to Islamic literature, or encountering Islamic scholarship in a university setting). This is because tenets of African American Islam in many ways, are espoused or received more as a cultural affiliation and/or utilized as tools of empowerment and survival in Black communities. Indeed normative African American culture, including naming practices, ideas about respectable dress, modesty, self-determination, nutrition philosophies and dietary rules, and recovery and rehabilitation ideas, contains a strong influence of Islam and the Arabic language. It is entirely possible to be unaware of the religious nature of Black communal and social expressions; and while within the African American culture there is a strong presence of Islam and its religious tenets, that does not always reflect an intentional observation of the religion.

For example, mosque teachings on economic and educational empowerment,<sup>114</sup> social uplifting, cleanliness, moral strength,<sup>115</sup> self-discipline, dietary rules (abstaining from pork and alcohol), modest dress and behavior<sup>116</sup> are a few important themes intermingled in standard day-to-day communications and one can obtain these principles without attending a masjid. Every barbershop and bookstore conversation is laced through and through with reminders of these philosophies to demarcate membership in, assess authentic affiliation, and to hail members of the African American community. This phenomenon can be observed when Black

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<sup>113</sup> I emphasize strongly that I am not suggesting that African American Islam is a monolith, instead I am arguing that many of these expressions are found in predominantly Black cities that I have visited where I have interacted with Black residents of said communities.

<sup>114</sup> McCloud, *African American Islam*, 17.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 3.

people encounter each other in cultural hubs of communal exchange, when frequenting hair braiding and barber shops, dining at culturally-affirming restaurants, buying and selling rich assortments of natural hygiene products in small shops, drinking herbal teas and free trade coffee at local markets, and adorning themselves at culturally-affirming clothing markets. For example, as I exit the post office in Los Angeles, located in a predominantly Black enclave, a common greeting I am offered is “As-Salaam-Alaikum,” the Arabic greeting meaning “Peace be unto you,” and the standard salutation among members of the Nation of Islam. The proper response, I learned in over-hearing the cultural exchange at a corner barbershop is “Wa-Alaikum-Salaam,” meaning “And unto you peace.” Black males greet each other by utilizing the title of “God,” and the Black female is greeted by the male with the term “Earth.” While shopping in a Black owned aromatherapy shop, an older Black man lists the many medicinal purposes for honey. The shop owner text proofs his analysis by narrating an account of honey having great healing benefits, and how its properties are mentioned in both the Qur'an by the Prophet Muhammad and the Prophetic Hadith. Black males can be seen wearing slacks closely cropped above their ankle. When asked the significance, one Muslim adherent replied with the historical significance on how the Prophet Muhammad felt about garments not touching the floor. A hadith is said to warn that clothing draping below the ankle is inappropriate. The reason the Prophet encouraged this fashion of wearing one's pants was to discourage arrogance. The people of Mecca during his era would drag their clothes on the ground in arrogance, suggesting that their means and wealth would allow for purchasing of other garments should they become damaged.

Additional examples of Islam-infused practices impacting Black day-to-day life is centered around rituals of cleanliness and hygiene. When visiting a Sister/Friend's<sup>117</sup> apartment for a coffee visit and seeing the *lota* on the toilet bowl top, I gained exposure to another religious ritual Muslims follow as narrated by the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet performed *istinja*, the act of washing the genitalia with water after *najis*, the process of cleaning oneself after a bowel movement. I noticed some women from this community have this container that resembles a garden watering can. This is also found inside the women's restroom in the masjid at which I conducted my ethnographic research. For a community that was always alleged to be filthy and was accused of being carriers of disease in order to justify forcible removal from and segregation of public facilities,<sup>118</sup> congregants in religious communities with very careful cleanliness rituals also adhere to them as a means to challenge these particular forms of hyper-pathologization.

I contend, during these cultural interactions, that African Americans Muslims conduct themselves in a manner that reflect the understandings and expressions of Islam which allow for the creation of a sacred counter-space in a secular society that is poisonous and malicious toward Black bodies. Simultaneously, these expressions teach religious truth in a manner that strengthens community ties and creates bonds. From the Arabic greetings heard on the streets, to the way in which clothing is worn, Black bodies become the spiritual text through which religious and spiritual knowledge is espoused and received. In this pedagogical method, the

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<sup>117</sup> Lillian Comas-Diaz, Marcella Bakur Weiner, eds., *Women Psychotherapists' Reflections on Female Friendships: Sisters of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 139. African American women coined the term Sister/Friend to designate the special female bond. In *Women Psychotherapist*, the editors relate how Thema Bryant-Davis describes in detail the healing of a Sister/Friend in the lives of African American women.

<sup>118</sup> "Damn! Lil Black Girl Popped a White Boy Square in the Mouth for Calling Black People 'Dirty,'" *The Gudda*, video uploaded July 24, 2018, <https://www.thegudda.com/damn-lil-black-girl-popped-a-white-boy-in-his-mouth/>; Chapter 7 of Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of a White Skin* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015) talks about this in detail.

Holy Quran and the Hadiths *are not* the only text in which spiritual knowledge can be found. Many trends that are categorized or identified alongside Islam as Muslim, are found in Black spaces whether or not the theology is directly related to Islam. Therefore it is up for debate if the interactions I witnessed are interpretations of Islam or if they are not because of multiple meanings associated with these religious texts.

African American Muslim female scholar and Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at DePaul University, Aminah Beverly McCloud notes that in order to understand the various expressions of African American Islamic identity, it is necessary to comprehend American Islamic history and the Arabic language. McCloud's writings illuminate our understandings of how African American expressions of Islam permeate and facilitate urban city exchanges by expanding upon a concept entitled, '*asabiya* initially coined by 14<sup>th</sup> century Arab social historian, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406).<sup>119</sup> McCloud writes that "Khaldun's states, " '*Asabiya* refers to kinship relations, which exert themselves in a feeling of tribal solidarity, common ethical understandings and ultimately, in a community identity.'<sup>120</sup> However, McCloud expands Khaldun's definition of '*asabiya* to include group affiliations that are somewhat broader in character, affiliations that comprise national and cultural identities." McCloud makes the assertion that '*asabiya* is important because it can be linked to a key theme throughout the history of African American Islam, the theme of nation- building.<sup>121</sup> McCloud writes, "the history of African American Islam can be witnessed as a group of people attempting to build '*asabiya* in a hostile environment."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> McCloud, *African American Islam*, 4.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 4.



It is my argument that African American expressions and practices of Islam are espoused not only in everyday communication in urban centers, but also in Hip Hop music which contains political agendas and spiritual knowledge for marginalized Black communities.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, *'asabiya* is also a constant theme throughout Hip Hop music which makes certain rap songs religious texts that are interpreted through teachings gleaned from the implicit and explicit curriculum of Black masjids. In such religious spaces, the message often includes wisdom for re-humanization and continuing a sacred life in the midst of hyper-pathologization.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that this study addresses and articulates how Black male youth, alongside their religious communities, are learning to remedy the violence committed against their bodies and spirits in US society. I maintain that much of the trauma and violence committed by educational systems and justice systems are counteracted by the creation of alternative learning places of sacred incubation, specifically A.M.E. churches and Black masjids. I suggest that A.M.E. churches, and Black masjids are designed to be insular and incubated in efforts to prepare Black minds to internalize the concept that their bodies *are* the sacred space. Therefore, this study is important because we must ask the question of Black religious educators in these alternative spaces, provided as trauma units for Black youth: What does it mean to have a sacred Black body in an American society where Black male youthhood is under attack? Similar to Trayvon Martin, Black youth will be killed because there are laws like “Stand your Ground” in Florida which allows Black teens to be killed without any legal

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<sup>123</sup> Lakeyta M. Bonnette, *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics*, American Governance: Politics, Policy, and Public Law (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 31.

consequences for the perpetrator of the crimes.<sup>124</sup> We must ask these questions to begin the process of re-imagining counter spaces for young Black youth to be allowed to feel their emotions, express anger, sadness, and love. Will these counter spaces challenge toxic masculinities and limitations placed on Black youth provided by race, gender, class, and sexually social constructs? This ethnographic study suggests and assumes that these two spaces of religious learnings provide pedagogical methods which promote the sacredness of all life, in particularly, Black life, and also provide alternative educational methods steeped in Afrocentric pedagogies that directly refute societal messages and stereotypes that pathologize Black youth in the areas of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The hyper-pathologization of Black youth bodies in the educational and justice systems is rooted in racism, and deeply interconnected with sexism, classism and homophobia. Although the traumas faced by Black male youths and their communities have evolved into sophisticated systematically sanctioned violence against their bodies and spirits, my research conclusions invite Black religious educators, and the youth they serve alongside, to consider interrogating their pedagogical frameworks. Instead of submitting to the false narrative that Black youths are the problem, I propose the question: How might we think about remedies that are available in the miraculous sheer existence of young Black religious men and the artistic and adult mother-networks and kin that are socializing them? How can religious research explore and make sense of the leaders and members of these communities who do not feel that Black religious youth are the problem but who are daily problematizing and rejecting the policies, ideologies, practices, and advocates of this fallacy? How does creating counter-spaces in both of these religious communities with the youth

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<sup>124</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), xiii.

themselves change how we understand the spiritual capacities of religious African American youth?

## **Structure of Dissertation**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Background of Problem

Statement of Problem

Purpose of the Study

Importance of Study

Research Questions

Research Hypothesis

Scope and Limitation of Dissertation

Definition of Terms

Summary

### **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

Theoretical Framework(s) underlying the research purpose

Summary

### **Chapter 3: Methodology (Qualitative)**

Research Design

Participants

Role of Researcher

Information Collection

Procedures

Information Analysis

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

Data Analysis and Results, organized according to the research questions

### Ethnography as Methodology

In this research project, I investigate how African American male youth, ages 7-17, use Hip Hop music in their everyday lives to sustain their spiritual resilience.

### **Risk of working with African American youth males ages 7-17 in group settings?**

This ethnographic research project includes helping Black youth to magnify their voices and unite further in their religious community and greater society, allowing them to narrate their own stories. In *Tapping the Perspectives of Children*, Mishna et al.<sup>125</sup> writes that “researchers in the consent process are expected to disclose potential risks youth may experience,”<sup>126</sup> when engaging as co-researchers, including but not limited to the following: “loss of social status in religious communities or greater society, embarrassment, fear or anxiety; loss of free time because of commitment to research project,”<sup>127</sup> the range of potential risks may be difficult to assess in any research context, though the researcher was prepared to direct any threats to safety or other concerning data to the appropriate authorities after

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<sup>125</sup> Faye Mishna, Beverley J. Antle, and Cheryl Regehr, “Tapping the Perspectives of Children: Emerging Ethical Issues,” *Qualitative Social Work* 3. 4 (December 2004): 455.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 454-455.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

thoroughly determining them as worrisome with the researcher's supervisor.<sup>128</sup> With this mentioned, other risks involved with working with African American male youth began with the fact that this population of focus is a "doubly protected class"<sup>129</sup>—both are African American males and under the age of 18. The researcher worked alongside two separate youth groups, an adolescent<sup>130</sup> African American Muslim group, and an African American Christian (AME) group.

### Scope and Limitations of Dissertation

As with many dissertations, this project must be considered within the cultural context of the reviewer. Therefore, the scope and limitations of this project begin with the fact that the literature chosen tends to focus on the more positive aspects of Hip Hop culture as opposed to solely engaging the negative aspects of the controversial genre. I will engage the negative aspects such as misogynist lyrics, violence, profanity, and other controversial topics. However, this is not the sole focus of this project. Additionally, the researcher understands that two groups of six African American youth (age 7-17) is not a representative sample of all African Americans youth everywhere. This is not a large enough sample to generalize. Therefore, the researcher will not make generalizations about the population of focus of African American male youth in either the African American mosque or the African American Episcopal Church.

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<sup>128</sup> Ron Iphofen, "Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology," *Australasian Human Research Ethics Consultancy Services*, published June 30, 2015; posted December 16, 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop_en.pdf), 37-38, 40.

<sup>129</sup> Mishna, Antle, and Regehr, 455.

<sup>130</sup> Julie Tinson, *Conducting Research with Children and Adolescents: Design, Methods, and Empirical Cases* (Woodeaton, Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Limited, 2009), 3. Julie Tinson operationalizes the term 'adolescence' and explains how it is distinguished from 'child,' and the term 'young people'.

### **Dissertation's contribution to knowledge both theory and practice**

This research topic is important as an original contribution to Hip Hop pedagogical discourse as an addition to the field of practical theology. While there are many academic institutions and academic conferences teaching and discussing Hip Hop's relevance as it relates to religion, political science, cultural studies, and economic studies, there is room in the theoretical research on Hip Hop to explore how Hip Hop impacts the spiritual lives of African American youth and their connection to their sacred texts (Qur'an and Bible). Additionally, in this research I focus specifically upon Muslim and Christian youth from an interreligious and interdisciplinary approach. This original ethnographic research observes the spiritual practices of Black youth in two spiritual communities in the context of social oppression in the United States.

Following a major contributor to Black expressive culture, anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), I used participant observation during my ethnographic research interviews. During my interviews, I modeled the ways in which research dialogue can flourish through engaging Hip Hop culture and African American religious practices. For example, I utilized the narratives in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935) as a framework for how researchers can record multiple communal exchanges of dialogue within an African American context involving cross-talking, signifying, and narrative overlap. Hurston illustrates how these conversations should be presented with authenticity and integrity by utilizing an idiographic

qualitative research approach.<sup>131</sup> This approach of engaging qualitative methods allows the researcher to focus on the individual and to emphasize the unique personal experiences of the participants. The narratives in Hurston's text provide readers with evidence that she favored unstructured interviews and thematic analysis during story-telling, which allow an in-depth insight into her characters' individual behavior. The narrative interviews found in *Mules and Men* depict the nuance of Black America's folklore, usage of the Black vernacular as regional communication, and, more importantly, illustrates how Hurston, an anthropologist from Eatonville, Florida, was familiar with hearing the songs and sermons, sayings and tall tales that have formed an oral history of the Black American South since the time of slavery.<sup>132</sup> Similar to my reasons for conducting this research, Hurston gathered material from her community members to expose the complexities of the social context of Black life. She captured the stories, songs, and communal ways of life in real time.<sup>133</sup> Like Hurston before me, I plan to capture the imagination, creativity, genius, and wisdom that are the unique heritage of African American religion and Hip Hop culture.

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<sup>131</sup> Jonathan Smith, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009), 29-32.

<sup>132</sup> Zora N. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, third ed. ( New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 1-4.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE THROUGH ANCESTORS**

Cultural nationalism has manifested throughout the religious history of African Americans. Before Black indigenous populations were involuntarily brought to America, their varied religious experiences laid the foundation for deriving a group identity through religion. In the United States, Black enslaved peoples began to forge separate lives from white people via religious identities, and after slavery this separateness accelerated into the establishment of self-governing Black organizations, both religious and political.

This survey of Black cultural nationalism in African-American religious history will explore this progression, describing the major religious movements in pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century Africa and in American slave populations until the abolition of slavery in the U.S. Then, it will describe the ways religion became closely tied with cultural nationalism in the African-American population from the end of slavery to the Great Migration and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the latter part of this historical overview, I will describe some of the educational theories within nationalistic religious traditions noting their commonalities, as well as introducing a few of the major leaders of black cultural nationalism, including Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X. I will also analyze the movement's strengths: challenging oppression, self-determination, and unity within the black race; and its most prominent weakness, the oppression and the blatant disrespect of black women. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, music (which has been closely tied to religion throughout African-American history) has become a primary avenue for the expression of black cultural nationalism, and so I will conclude with a brief



discussion of Hip-Hop music, arguing that its strengths and weaknesses are remarkably similar to those of black cultural nationalism.

The most foundational source for my arguments is a close reading of *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-Americans*, the 1999 publication of African-American seminary professor, theologian, ethicist, and Civil Rights activist Gayraud S. Wilmore. In addition to Wilmore's seminal text, I supplemented my research with other prominent African-American scholars of various fields who articulate the breadth and diversity of black experiences throughout the world. For example, sociologist Edward Franklin Frazier's 1939 book, *The Negro Family in the United States* contains an exhaustive explanation of black religious traditions and black family life beginning with colonial-era slavery and extending through emancipation. The 1968 book by Albert G. Cleage, a Black Christian nationalist, political activist, and religious leader, depicts Jesus as a black revolutionary leader. It is a foundational text for explaining Jesus Christ's presence in the socio-religious life of African Americans. Cleage emphasizes Christ as a black savior, opposing the traditional Eurocentric depiction of Christ with blond hair and blue eyes. Cleage's second book *Black Christian Nationalism*, published in 1972, is an introduction to the Black Christian Nationalist Movement, an important nationalistic sect of 20<sup>th</sup> Century black Christianity. Another scholar whose work contributes to this essay is Jacquelyn Grant, an African-American minister and theologian who argues that the black church, black theology, and society in general should acknowledge sexism and advocate for women's rights. These and other scholarly works inform my argument throughout this survey of black religious history and its connection to black cultural nationalism.

### **West African Religious Practices: The Strength of Community**

The purpose of this section is to explore how African religions – primarily African Traditional Religions (ATR), though also the Abrahamic religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity – encouraged a communal sense of identity among Africans, sowing seeds that would one day grow into black cultural nationalism in the United States. The reason my discussion of Africa is restricted for the most part to West Africa and the Congo-Angola region, is that it has been well-documented that the majority of slaves brought to America came from these areas.<sup>134</sup> The peoples located in these areas include the Mandinke, Yoruba, Ibo, Bakongo, Ewe, and Fon. Wilmore notes that, during the 11th century, religious encounters occurred between African civilizations that exposed people who practiced African Traditional Religions (ATR) to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Wilmore accounts for the pre-exposure of African civilizations to these Abrahamic traditions before the trans-Atlantic slave trade through cross-pollinating “visits” between African people from the North and those in Central and West Africa.<sup>135</sup>

Wilmore defines the term African Traditional Religions (ATR) as the primal, essentially monotheistic but operationally polytheistic and heterogeneous religions of Africa. It is the worship of a God and of gods, closely identified with primordial ancestors, tribal histories, and founders of various African ethnic groups. ATR generally does not have sacred scriptures, a single founder, central temple or sanctuary, schools of prophets, ecclesiastical organization, or sacerdotal officialdom – at least not in the way Westerners understand

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<sup>134</sup> Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992), 194.

<sup>135</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 6-8.

organized religion.<sup>136</sup><sup>137</sup> In fact, European Christian missionaries to Africa were implicitly opposed to ATR beliefs and dismissed them as primitive, magic, and devilish.<sup>138</sup> ATR distinguishes between protective magic and harmful magic as well as between medicine men and witches, but Europeans dismissed all of ATR as evil.<sup>139</sup> Despite this, Wilmore writes that many West African peoples brought their religious practices to America, and with them came specific elements like root doctors, voodoo, sacred stories, and magic, all of which would change and grow into a national consciousness among Black slaves in America.

Most importantly, the Africans brought to America a sense of community from their religious experiences in Africa. Blacks would not have been able to challenge the powers that enslaved them without this strong sense of community, togetherness, and power that their belief system provided. Catherine L. Albanese, religion scholar and world religions professor, notes how ATR practices planted seeds of revolution by enhancing the communal spirit of the people. Many slaves coming from Africa believed that conjuring the spirits of their ancestors strengthened them. Albanese writes about worship ceremonies in which the deceased ancestors were acknowledged and revered. The earthly reward would be good health, fertility, or they could ask for the ancestors to someone as payment for wrong doing.<sup>140</sup> In most West African religions, once the ancestors died, they became gods. This divine position gave the ancestors

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<sup>136</sup> Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 4.

<sup>137</sup> Let it suffice for this research investigation to note that African Traditional Religions (ATR) are not at all homogeneous. ATR practices and beliefs are extremely vast and detailed. Furthermore, Wilmore Gayraud descends into a thorough analysis of beliefs and practices throughout the continent of Africa. This succinct definition of ATR for the purposes of this research is to locate a universalized reading of themes found in ATR practices.

<sup>138</sup> P.E. Nmah and B.O.S. Udezo, "Missionary Historiography: A Factor for the Emergence of African Nationalism," *African Research Review* 6 (2012): 243, accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/afrrrev/article/viewFile/74925/65519>.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 194.

the ability to mediate between the gods and ordinary people.<sup>141</sup> When African worshippers in the United States practiced these beliefs they built a strong unbreakable sense of community; they gave them divine position with their ancestors, the gods, and they believed the evils committed against them would not go unpunished. The power of their spiritual assembly nurtured their ability to galvanize the slave community. Unfortunately, their captors realized the communal power of the Africans' religions. Albanese writes, "During the Middle passage, blacks were deliberately isolated from those who came from their community or spoke their language."<sup>142</sup> In this isolated state, it became much more difficult for slaves to rebel, and so the oppressive slavery continued for years.

### **Black Oral Religious Transmission During Slavery**

Still, elements of the slaves' religious experiences in Africa influenced their culture in America and gave them support and hope. For example, the sacred stories that passed through oral tradition helped inspire and build leaders like *Griots* the storytellers in the slave community. Additionally, the root doctor's ability to heal and provide medical assistance made this a powerful position. Storytellers and doctors were two political figures in the slave community who had immense power. These black spiritual leaders cultivated the spirit of nationalism by assisting the slave community in their struggles and serving as examples of black leadership.

Thomas A. Hale, scholar and professor of African, French, and comparative literature, writes in his book *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* about the job description

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 197.

of the Griot, the value of the Griot's words, and the power of their sacred stories, such as the African Trickster stories that includes Gods and Tricksters.<sup>143</sup> Hale writes about the value of the Griots on the plantation. He notes that their power is embodied in their functions of advice-giving, diplomacy, and instrumental music, as well as in the verbal arts which include recounting history, teaching students, and reporting news. The presence of the Griot's leadership ushered in a spirit of nationalism for enslaved Africans not only because they strengthened the community, but because they were respected outside the slave community as well. Hale writes "from a functional perspective, these activities contribute to a portrait of an extremely dynamic profession that enables societies to cohere."<sup>144</sup> Hale also describes the Griots power by noting that his counsel "reveal[s] both a personal and a collective link between the subject and those who are inescapably bound to her for political and social reasons."<sup>145</sup>

The second political figure in the enslaved community, who had extreme power was the root doctor who acted as the West-African priest. Albanese explains that it is under the guidance of the root doctor that healer spells were cast and healings occurred.<sup>146</sup> In addition to the possessing powers to heal their own community, root doctors provided medical assistance to whites and exchanged medical knowledge on the slave plantation. S.M. Cotton researcher and scholar, who writes about the influences of slave medicine on white plantation owners, goes into methods in which it flourished on plantations. Cotton writes,

Illnesses on the antebellum Southern plantation provided myriad opportunities for knowledge interaction between African Americans and whites...Whites and African-Americans living on a plantation were around each other a great deal. Their children

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<sup>143</sup> Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>146</sup> Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 197.

were playmates...Adult slave women cared for white children and influenced them greatly in their formative years. Historian Mechal Sobel concluded from her study of eighteenth-century interaction among Virginians that whites of the slave owning class also went to African-American herb doctors and probably conjure doctors as well. Slave narratives speak to the continuation of this same type of intense interaction well into the nineteenth-century.<sup>147</sup>

The root doctors used their knowledge of herbs and plants to concoct healing ointments, poultices, and other remedies. An excellent healer could become famous among whites and blacks, receiving visitors of both races in need of healing. The Griots and the root doctors were remnants of ATR that gave the slave community cultural awareness, healing, and hope in their race's ability to produce skilled leaders.

### **Many Women Were There: Black Women in Black Communities**

Although sexism was prevalent, and scholarship—among African Americans—has largely ignored the experiences of Black women, women were integral to the formation of black cultural nationalism. They were influential in churches, and they played key roles in social activism. After the end of slavery, a black middle-class began to emerge, and some black women now had the time to look beyond the immediate necessities of life.<sup>148</sup> These women began pursuing leadership roles, and several female leaders in this era raised the issue of women's ordination--only to be rebuffed by the male hierarchy. Undaunted, these women formed missionary societies to address all manner of local and international needs, from the support of job training in their communities to funding for African American missionaries to

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<sup>147</sup> Sarah Mitchell Cotton, "Bodies of Knowledge: The Influence of Slaves on the Antebellum Medical Community" (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997), 10-11.

<sup>148</sup> Jacquelyn Grant, "Black Theology and the Black Woman," in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, eds. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2003), 833.

Africa. They worked on urban ills, established reading groups, and advocated for better living conditions. They also wrote for religious periodicals, promoting quiet traditional ideals of Victorian womanhood, respectability, and racial uplift. They worked among their counterparts in the rural South, protesting the effects of Jim Crow laws and the systematic violence of lynching.<sup>149</sup> In *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, Wilmore reports on black women's contributions and the rise of black freedom and the rise of Black Nationalism. Wilmore writes male historians of religion have "misconstrued certain developments by leaving out the understandings of African American women."<sup>150</sup> Although the accomplishments of women have been overlooked, from the very beginning of the establishment of the Black Churches, black women were important members of the movement.

As previously discussed, sexism is one of Black cultural nationalism's greatest weaknesses. It is a contradiction in Black Churches and the Black Nationalist movement; once black men are free from the white oppression of slavery, they begin to oppress Black women. In her article, "Black Theology and the Black Women," Grant writes about this progression. In the slave culture, women and male slaves both had "equality in their inequality."<sup>151</sup> Whites demeaned both black men and black women in the slave community as "sharing the characteristics of 'emotionality and irrationality.'"<sup>152</sup> As a response, the schism between black men and black women deepened as black men sought to empower themselves by using a White male-dominated society's standards, this standard that they embraced further perpetuated white Western standards of "beauty" and "ugliness."<sup>153</sup> This further created a rift in black

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<sup>149</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Culture & Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 5.

<sup>150</sup> Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, xiii.

<sup>151</sup> Grant, "Black Theology and the Black Woman," 846.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 833.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 835.

communities, because the Eurocentric standard of “blond hair and blue eyes” further isolated and psychologically castrate Black women.<sup>154</sup> She challenges black men to critique the White-dominated theology that is divisive and oppressive and also characterized by black enslavement and has carved no place for black women. Grant challenges Black men to not accept the liberation of Black men that address racist stereotypes without being attentive to sexist ideologies that are equally oppressive to women.<sup>155</sup>

### **The Great Migration and Beyond: Black Religion and New Cult Movement**

African American religion underwent a process of further diversification in the early 20th Century as an increasing number of blacks began to migrate from the rural South to the cities of both the North and the South. By this time, two National Baptist associations and three Black Methodist denominations had become the mainstream churches in black urban communities. Congregations affiliated with these denominations were mass churches in that they often crosscut class lines. Conversely, black congregations that were affiliated with white-controlled Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches catered primarily to economically elite African Americans.<sup>156</sup>

Although the mainstream churches often valiantly attempted to cater to the social needs of the migrants, their middle-class orientation often made the migrants ill at ease. As a consequence, many migrants established and joined storefront and house churches, many of which eventually became affiliated with one of the black-controlled mainstream denominations. Often, however, the migrants were attracted to a wide array of Holiness-

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 835.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 833.

<sup>156</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 124.



Pentecostal or Sanctified, Spiritual, Islamic, Judaic, and other syncretistic sects, such as Father Divine's Peace Mission and Daddy Grace's United House of Prayer for All People.<sup>157</sup> During its zenith in the 1920s and 1930s, the Peace Mission movement catered to the unmet social and psychic needs of working-class blacks who elevated their leader to the status of God. The Depression Era accelerated the process of religious diversification in black communities. Throughout the 20th Century, African Americans explored the richness and diversity of their religious traditions. This included the Holiness and Pentecostal churches with their focus on baptism in the Holy Spirit and enthusiastic worship that sometimes involved speaking in tongues. The Great Migration of Southern rural Blacks to cities in the South and North also generated a variety of religious options outside of Christianity with the founding of groups such as the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam.<sup>158</sup>

### **Black Nationalism**

Marcus Garvey is one of the most important figures in 20th Century black cultural nationalism. Garvey was a Jamaican-born convert to Catholicism. He ushered blacks into the advent of the “New Negro” during the Harlem Renaissance. He used phrases like “a black God is coming.” The Marcus Garvey movement and the Great Migration are the two most important events in black American history. Marcus Garvey won the hearts and minds of ordinary working-class black people both domestically and abroad. He was active politically between 1914 and 1930. He preached and taught pan-African concepts of racial pride, and self-pride, and self-help. These concepts were also embraced by the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which led to the founding of the first and the largest mass-

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 121,125.

<sup>158</sup> Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 197.

organized movement of Black Americans and the first international racial exodus. This movement was designed to challenge the cultural, political, racial, economical, religious oppression placed upon the black population by Europeans and European Americans.

The Marcus Garvey philosophy embodied the teachings of significant uplifting attributes of black culture. The Garvey Movement incorporated two powerful elements that propelled the movement forward that included: 1) Black Nationalism: the political concept of the nation, state and 2) the cultural concept of Pan-Africanism, all incorporated in an international massive black movement of self-determinism.

Turner writes that Garvey's philosophy had a profound impact on the Nation of Islam, and I would argue black Judaism, and Christianity as well. But many of the ideas that inspired Garvey were ideas that came from Edward Wilmot Blyden, one of the most significant West African nationalists. These ideas were cross-pollinated across Asia, Africa, United States, Europe, and the West Indies as they reaffirmed black identities by encouraging self-determination. The Muslims in these regions utilized Garvey's ideas to propel a Pan-Islamic movement. Most importantly, Garvey understood the black sense of connectedness to Africa as the homeland of people with African ancestry. Garvey tapped into the psychological and emotional symbolism of Africa as the focus of universal longing, a sense of going home, as a thread of hope for black people. The Universal Negro Improvement Association had many chapters in different urban cities populated with blacks. Garvey fostered the concept of a transnational black republic in Liberia, but the Garvey movement was politically and religiously diverse. Blacks, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Socialists, and Marxists were involved in electoral politics. Many people compared Garvey to the Prophet Muhammad.

### **Black Nationalism in Islamic Traditions**

The Black messianic sects of nationalism affirm the Black experience and foster Black cultural nationalism. The best known of the messianic-nationalist sects subscribe to Islam. Noble Drew Ali established the first of these, the Moorish Science Temple, in Newark, New Jersey, around 1913. The Nation of Islam, initially under the leadership of Wallace D. Fard, began during the early 1930s in Detroit and subsequently under Elijah Muhammad.<sup>159</sup> Noble Drew Ali (who was born Timothy Drew, in North Carolina) (1886-1929) was the founder of the Moorish Science Temple of America. He founded the first Temple in Newark, New Jersey, in 1923 and soon there were branches in Pittsburgh, Detroit, and other major industrial cities of the northeast, especially in neighborhoods that had attracted mass black migration from the South.<sup>160</sup>

Ali moved to Chicago in 1925 and it was there that his movement took on its greatest force. Noble Drew Ali saw Marcus Garvey as an inspiration for his own efforts.<sup>161</sup> He spoke of Garvey as a voice in the wilderness on the issue of racial pride, an orator and prophet who had prepared Black people to be receptive to Ali's own message. Like Garvey, Ali preached the importance of developing unity among all peoples of the African Diaspora. Black Nationalists specifically lauded Marcus Garvey as a John the Baptist who prepared the way for the coming of Noble Drew Ali at Moorish Science Temple meetings.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Dorman, *Chosen People*, 147-151.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 1-2, 90-101.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 79.

Like Marcus Garvey, the Nation of Islam's leaders taught that the world was headed for a War of Armageddon that would pit the black race against its white oppressors.<sup>163</sup> Unlike the Garvey movement, which was predominantly Christian, and which adopted many of the rituals of Christian worship in its meetings, Noble Drew Ali stressed his belief that all blacks, Asiatics, Turks, Arabs, and Latin Americans--i.e. what we would today describe as people of color--were in origin Moorish, or Moslem. Ali used many of the same tactics to attract and hold followers as Marcus Garvey did with the UNIA.<sup>164</sup>

The Moorish Science Temple had street orators, members had badges and membership cards and certificates, and the organization was structured with several branches in different cities, just like the UNIA.<sup>165</sup> While Ali lauded Garvey, and used Garvey's name to attract Garveyites into his own movement, Garvey on his side was skeptical about Ali and his motives, claiming to know nothing about Ali or his organizing efforts that used his (Garvey's) name. The connection, though, was an important one. Noble Drew Ali and others who urged black people to feel black pride and endorse holy living and the Muslim faith – and who pointed to the earlier teachings of Garvey – were in turn links to other important leaders and developments within the Nation of Islam.<sup>166</sup> Importantly, Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, praised both Ali and Garvey as forerunners for his own movement, and the legacy of Garveyism and Islam is continued in the work of Louis Farrakhan and others. The

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<sup>163</sup> Bruce Perry, *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed America* (Berrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1991), 113.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 107.

Nation of Islam grew rapidly, in part due to the militant preaching of Malcolm X during the early 1960s.<sup>167</sup>

Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little was a convert to the Nation of Islam. He experienced a conversion after his involvement with drugs.<sup>168</sup> During his tenure in prison, Malcolm began to educate himself thereupon and changed his life and the lives of those around him.<sup>169</sup> After his release, he began to convert others in the Norfolk colony prison. Upon release Malcolm was assigned to the post of assistant minister to Elijah Muhammad.<sup>170</sup> Bruce Perry, author of *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America* writes that Malcolm X became a prominent black Muslim minister in the Nation and to the world expressing to massive black audiences the intolerance that blacks should have for racial disparities in America. He was documented in speeches and television programs that aired across the country like *The Hate that Hate Produced*.<sup>171</sup> Malcolm reminded white America that white racism spawned black separatism and black racism. This rapid growth of Black Muslim groups did not check schismatic tendencies that led to the appearance of numerous splinter groups, including the Ahmadiyya Moslem movement of Chicago, the Hanafis of Washington, D.C., and the Ansaru Allah community of Brooklyn. Following the assassination of Malcolm X and the death of Elijah Muhammad, Wallace D. Muhammad led the transformation of the Nation into the American Muslim Mission. To counter the Mission's shift to orthodox Islam, Louis Farrakhan established a reconstituted Nation of Islam.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 176-184.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>169</sup> Perry, 117.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 144-145.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 175.

### Black Nationalism in Christian Tradition

Black nationalism in the Christian tradition embodied controversial teachings within broader Christianity (it seems to be the religion with the most dramatic white/black schism, and these black Christian messianic sects were often seen as cults). The concept of universal love of all of humanity is not taught in Black Nationalism. Many Black Nationalist teachings promote bigotry, intolerance, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. Many Black Nationalists influenced the movement away from Black Christian Churches. For an example, Martin Robison Delany was an African-American abolitionist, journalist, physician, and writer, arguably the first proponent of Black Nationalism. Martin Delany is considered to be the grandfather of Black nationalism<sup>173</sup> African American scholar of black religion Anthony B. Pinn writes “Martin Delany placed the blame for the enslavement of Africans squarely on the shoulders of Europeans.”<sup>174</sup> Also individuals like Casey Hayford and Wilmot Edward Blyden-- who according to Nmah, and Uzedo, were the expression of Christianity in African culture-- founded African churches.<sup>175</sup>

The smallest wing of messianic nationalism remained within the Christian fold. George McGuire, a former Anglican priest from Jamaica, established the African Orthodox Church as the religious arm of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Association. Albert B. Cleage (later known as Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman<sup>176</sup>), a former United Church of Christ minister, began to assert in the 1960s that Jesus had been a revolutionary who came to free peoples of color from

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<sup>173</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering: A History of Theodicy in African-American Religious Thought* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002), 12.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>175</sup> Nmah and Uzedo, "Missionary Historiography," 243.

<sup>176</sup> Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 244.

white oppression, and established the Black Christian Nationalist Church.<sup>177</sup> Albert Cleage Jr. is the founder of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, the Freedom Now Party, and the Group on Advanced Leadership.<sup>178</sup> During the summer of 1967, Detroit uprisings in black communities moved Cleage to preach earth-shattering sermons from his pulpit, which he published in his book *The Black Messiah*.<sup>179</sup> Wilmore writes that Cleage was the most controversial black theologian of his time. He taught that Jesus is the black Messiah—a descendant of the nation of Israel that became a nation of blacks during its sojourn in Egypt and Babylon.<sup>180</sup> The black Messiah in Cleage’s view was part of an underground movement; he was a Zealot who taught black separatism, and the Apostle Paul and the Euro-American theologians had tainted his message of revolution.<sup>181</sup> He preached to his Detroit congregation:

So then, I would say to you, you are Christian, and the [teachings] you believe are the teachings of a Black Messiah named Jesus, and the things you do are the will of a black God called Jehovah; and almost everything you have heard about Christianity is essentially a lie.<sup>182</sup>

Cleage publicly disputed the idea that Christianity should espouse self-love and the redemptive suffering of the Black man. He declared that the Old Testament was canonical for the black nation. He preached that African Americans are God’s chosen people, and blacks are called to cleanse white America, purify the religion of Israel that the white man had tainted, and to begin revolutionary action “to rebuild the black community, one black nation, all

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<sup>177</sup> Albert B. Cleage Jr., *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (New York: William Moore and Company, Inc., 1972), 4.

<sup>178</sup> Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience*, 208.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 244-245.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Albert Cleage Jr., *The Black Messiah: The Religious Roots of Black Power - A Strong and Uncompromising Presentation* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 37.

stemming from the hub which is the Shrine of the Black Madonna.<sup>183</sup> His philosophy taught that blacks males needed only to rely on the black brotherhood, instead of relying on the white enemy.<sup>184</sup> Cleage's philosophy was that blacks should rely on self-aid to rebuild the black community.<sup>185</sup> Cleage taught that "Jesus was Black" and "he did not preach universal love"<sup>186</sup>

Wilmore notes that Cleage recognized how black youth felt torn when listening to Cleage's teachings and thinking about the state of their community.<sup>187</sup>

The issue of religion is constantly before many young persons who are drawn back into the ghettos by urgent logic of Black Power. As they return-from college or from prison-to struggle against ... "principalities and powers" which seem anonymously but fiercely to control the life of their people, they find themselves often insufficient as autonomous sources of inner strength. .... A few black Christian Churches have responded to the call of Black Power. In Detroit... the Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. ... preaches of a black revolutionary Jesus who came to set the nonwhite peoples free. A Black Madonna is the focal point of worship, and the church probably attracted more persons committed to Black Power than any single institution still connected to Christian churches.<sup>188</sup>

James Cone, an African American liberation theologian from Arkansas came on the scene with a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Northwestern from in Evanston, Illinois. Cone later joined the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York City.<sup>189</sup> He wrote his first book entitled *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) that appeared in the midst of the debates about Albert Cleage's "Black Manifesto" in 1969.<sup>190</sup> He was bringing to the black religion a theology that they could take seriously. For African American Christians, Cone gave black Christians economic power and political power within the classical framework of Christianity.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 245.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.



Cone influenced the path that black scholarship took by utilizing classical traditional theological writings from scholars like Karl Barth, Jurgen Moltmann, Paul Tillich, Albert Camus, and Frantz Fanon and married them with his own close readings of the Scriptures infusing them with the Black experience. His work was a staple for theological discussions. James Cone wrote in his first book that “Black theology is Christian theology *precisely* because it has the black predicament as its point of departure.”<sup>191</sup> In conclusion, many Black Nationalist teachings promote bigotry, intolerance, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. The nationalist movement emphasized racial solidarity, economic self-sufficiency, and self-help. The rise of the Black Muslims, occurred during the 1960s, which attracted members who were in the depths of the depression. The Nation of Islam drew its appeal from among the growing numbers of urban blacks living in poverty.

### **Educational Theories that Emerge in Nation of Islam (NOI)**

Malcolm X taught that black people were the original people of the world and that white people were a race of devils that were created by an evil scientist named Yakub. The Nation of Islam believed that black people were superior to white people, and that the demise of the white race was imminent. Richard Brent Turner writes in *Islam in the African American Experience* that the “idea that separated the Nation of Islam almost irrevocably from the larger Muslim community and other black American political and religious groups was the “hidden truth” that W.D. Fard taught Elijah Muhammad, the teaching that black and white people did not come from the same God.” In addition to this idea, they taught that blacks and whites were “fundamentally different” in nature: black people were “righteous and divine” and white people were wicked “blond blue-eyed devils.” Malcolm X said that Islam was the “true religion of

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<sup>191</sup> James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y. Orbis Books, 1997), 39.

black mankind” and that Christianity was “the white man’s religion” that had been imposed upon African Americans by their slave-masters. He said that the Nation of Islam followed Islam as it was practiced around the world, but the Nation’s teachings differed from those of other Muslims because they were adapted to the “uniquely pitiful” condition of black people in America. Turner writes that black Muslim leaders proclaimed that “Wallace Fard Muhammad, the founder of the Nation, was Allah incarnate. Additionally, the message that Elijah Muhammad was his Messenger, or Prophet.” The Nation of Islam proposed the establishment of a separate country for African Americans in the southern or southwestern United States as an interim measure until African Americans could return to Africa. Malcolm X suggested the United States government owed reparations to black people for the unpaid labor of their ancestors. He also rejected the civil rights movement's strategy of nonviolence, instead advocating that black people should defend themselves. Malcolm X was a key person in the Black Nationalist movement, and an extremely important historical figure in the Nation of Islam.

### **Commonalities in the Educational Theories of Black Nationalism**

The commonalities in the educational theories of Black Nationalist ideologies are unity within African American (*male*) communities, self-determination—that is, separation, or independence, from European society; self--help—that is, self-guided improvement economically, and intellectually. Additionally it seems that many Black Nationalist leaders were not only promoting but were actively involved with the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) as a movement of African Redemption. It was Marcus Garvey’s concepts of pan-Africanism and self-determinism that inspired their philosophies that ranged from the

Nation of Islam to the Rastafari movement (which proclaimed Garvey as a prophet).<sup>192</sup> Many black nationalists are active participants in the African Diaspora and African political affairs. Although Black Nationalist pedagogies were very attractive to many oppressed black people because they taught ideas that promoted social, political, economic, and spiritual freedom, many Black Nationalist leaders unfortunately also embraced misogyny. As a result, the Black Nationalist movement(s) as a whole was not vocal concerning the rights of black women who had consistently contributed to much of the fight for black civil liberties.

### The Healing/Saving Place of Music

#### **African American Religious Music**

While African American music is derived from a variety of sources, religion has historically served as one of its major inspirations. Albert Raboteau traces the “spiritual” to the camp meetings of the Second Awakening where blacks continued singing in their segregated quarters after the whites had retired for the night. Conversely, the spiritual also appears to have had its roots in the “preacher's chanted declamation and the intervening congregational responses.”<sup>193</sup> The “ring shout”<sup>194</sup> in which “shouters” danced in a circle to the accompaniment of a favorite spiritual sung by spectators standing on the sidelines was a common practice in many nineteenth-century black churches. By 1830, many black urban

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<sup>192</sup> Noel L. Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology (History of African-American Religions)* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 5.

<sup>193</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. 1978), 59-60.

<sup>194</sup> Robin Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimension of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 56, 183.

congregations had introduced choral singing into their services. Praying and Singing Bands became a regular feature of religious life in many black urban churches. Despite the opposition of African Methodist and other religious leaders to the intrusion of “cornfield ditties,” folk musical styles became an integral part of African American sacred music. After the Civil War, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a student ensemble at the newly established Fisk University in Nashville, did much to contribute to the dissemination of African American spirituals on tours both at home and abroad.<sup>195</sup>

Southern black gospel music emerged as an urban phenomenon in revivals conducted in tents, football stadiums, and huge tabernacles.<sup>196</sup> Although Charles Albert Tindley, a black Methodist minister, composed religious songs that drew upon the urban experiences of African Americans, around 1900, Thomas A. Dorsey is usually credited as having been the “Father of Gospel Music.”<sup>197</sup> Beginning around 1927, he promoted what he called “gospel songs” in churches in Chicago, the Midwest, and the South. At a time when many Baptist and Methodist churches rejected gospel music, Sanctified churches in both urban and rural areas embraced it wholeheartedly. The Church of God in Christ in particular has served as a prime mover in the development of contemporary gospel music. Spiritual churches also accepted gospel music and, in the case of New Orleans, jazz as an integral feature of their worship services.<sup>198</sup> In time, many mainstream congregations incorporated gospel music into their musical repertoire.

### **“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”: Black Freedom in the Black Church**

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 65-67.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>198</sup> Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit*, 56.

Although ATR continued to influence many slaves, the practice of Christianity also rose among the African-American slaves. After the Civil War, sharper religious differences emerged within black communities, especially as they had more freedom to diversify their churches. This is also the time when the most serious weakness of black cultural nationalism emerged, as free black men began to subjugate free black women.

In a massive missionary effort, Northern black leaders such as Daniel A. Payne and Theophilus Gould Steward established missions to their Southern States, resulting in the dynamic growth of independent black churches in the Southern states between 1865 and 1900. Predominantly white denominations like the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Episcopal churches also sponsored missions, opened schools for freed slaves, and aided the general welfare of Southern blacks, but many African Americans chose to join the independent black denominations founded in the Northern states during the antebellum era. Within a decade the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) churches claimed Southern membership in the hundreds of thousands, far outstripping that of any other organizations. They were quickly joined in 1870 by a new Southern-based denomination, the Colored (now “Christian”) Methodist Episcopal Church, founded by indigenous Southern black leaders. Thus, the end of slavery marked the beginning of great freedom for black Church leaders and an increase in the churches available to Black worshipers.

Also, the end of slavery marked the beginning of empowerment for Black men. These men now desired more formal recognition of their superior position in their families. Black women’s long-honored place in their families, their activism in society, and their contributions to the Christian church were minimized and ignored went unnoticed as Black men attempted to

reclaim a sense of masculinity. Frazier entitled this massive division in the Negro family the downfall of the matriarchate. In *The Negro Family in the United States*, Frazier writes about Noah Davis, an ex-slave who bought his own freedom, his wife's, and his children's. Frazier notes that Davis wanted his freedom to learn how to read the scriptures and to preach the gospel to his fellow sinners. Davis reportedly struggled for eight months to raise 800 dollars for his wife's freedom while ministering across the country at the same time. Frazier notes all of the "hindered labors" that newly freed slaves experienced in their efforts to borrow for money from their friends and white churches, and worked tirelessly to buy their loved-ones' freedom. Next, Frazier notes that Black males like Noah after purchasing their wives freedom, often sold them to other slave masters when they saw found the woman hard to please.

After slavery ended, Frazier claimed Black fathers struggled to claim more authority, and what followed was the economic subordination of the [black] woman. In some situations, the Black male's authority was a continuation of the slavery system, and he was interested in the permanent stability of having a wife and children only if it involved the acquisition of property. Frazier dedicates a portion of his book to documenting the role of a figure that he suspects has long been disregarded in scholarship – even by African-Americans scholars: the black grandmother, mother, and wife. She has been significantly supportive to and influential in black culture as mother, wife, nurse, midwife, cook, nanny, farmer, fisherman, gardener, etc. E. Franklin Frazier writes, "The freedmen during the Civil War observed that many men were exceedingly jealous of [the black woman's] newly acquired [freedom and presumed] authority in family relations and insisted upon a recognition their superiority over women." Altogether, although the end of slavery brought freedom to worship in black churches with black

leadership, it also brought an ugly side effect, as Black men became more sexist and oppressive to black women.

### **From Hymnody to Hip Hop: Rap Music as a Tool of Political Resistance**

In this section on black music, first I survey the political activism in Hip Hop. Secondly, I explore the sexism within Hip Hop. I argue that Hip Hop's musical development is a strength, while its byproduct, the male Hip Hop artists' sexist discrimination toward women is a weakness of black cultural nationalism.

Afrikka Bambata, Cool and the Gang, LL Cool J, Big Daddy Kane, Old Dirty B. Queen Latifah, Erika Bydu, Salt and Peppa, Mos Def, Talib Kwali, Poor Righteous Teachers, Public Enemy, Kanye West, Common, Naz, Ice Cube, Tupac Shakur — these are all Muslim and Christian rappers from the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Their messages range from awareness of God, to social consciousness of one's blackness. Their music includes spiritual critiques of lifestyles of the urban poor and of sources of tension and suffering in these places, like systemic racism and classism.<sup>199</sup> Black youth use the beats and rhymes of hip-hop and poetry to describe their daily harassment by the police, comment on teenage pregnancy and reflect on drug-infested communities. Black leaders used nationalistic ideas and reinterpreted the sacred to empower oppressed spiritual communities in congregations, mosques, and temples. Similarly, during the 1980s and the 1990s, groups of black youth used Pan-African concepts and sacred text to empower and continue political resistance in places where police brutality was rampant. Creating songs like "Fight the Power," Chuck D, the lead rapper of the group Public

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<sup>199</sup> Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience*, xxvi-xxvii.

Enemy, calls for intelligent activism and organization from his African-American community. He says, "What we need is awareness / We can't get careless [...] Let's get down to business / Mental self-defensive fitness."<sup>200</sup> In the line, Chuck D references his audience as "my beloved," an allusion to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the "beloved community."<sup>201</sup>

However, my critique of Hip Hop music as a product of Black Nationalism is similar to my critique of the Black Nationalism as a movement. Once the masses are attracted to it, it seems that it becomes the norm to oppress another group — in Hip Hop's case, equality for women and diverse sexualities are not embraced.

## Conclusion

To conclude: enslaved Africans transported to the New World beginning in the fifteenth century brought with them a wide range of local religious beliefs and practices. These religious practices were deeply rooted in Africa, like African Traditional Religions (ATR), African Islam, and other Abrahamic traditions like Christianity; these pre-slavery practices assisted in the stimulation of Black Nationalism. During the Great Migration, a wide variety of religious and spiritual identities developed. These newly freed groups were unified by incorporating Garvey's nationalistic philosophies. Afterwards, Black males attempted to regain their masculinity, their sense of wielding power, through the subjugation of women. Despite the many contributions

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<sup>200</sup> Laura K. Warrell, "Fight the Power," *Salon*, June 3, 2002, accessed October 31, 2014, [http://www.salon.com/2002/06/03/fight\\_the\\_power](http://www.salon.com/2002/06/03/fight_the_power).

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.



black women made to the movement, black men failed or refused to recognize the active and courageous participation of black women.

Finally, this survey of African American religious history attempts to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the black cultural nationalism movement. I have explored examples of the strengths that black nationalistic philosophies embody, including the promotion of unity within the black race, self-determination, self-pride, cultural pride, and the notion of challenging the cultural, political, racial, economic, and religious oppression of black people by European societies. The primary weakness that Black Nationalism exhibits is the oppression and the blatant disrespect of black women, as well as a misunderstanding of diverse sexualities. This has manifested in recent decades most recognizably in black music and Hip Hop culture. This research also analyzes the commonalities in educational theories that emerge in nationalistic religious traditions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BLACK THINKERS IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND A GLOSSARY OF RELATED WORDS

The Christian faith is formed and embodied in African-American communities of faith through the integration of insights from practical theology and its sub-discipline of religious education. Since practical theology is highly interdisciplinary. The social sciences include cultural studies, psychology, education, sociology, and anthropology and offer important insights into the formation of faith. In his book, *Practical Theology for Black Churches* (2002), practical theologian Dale P. Andrews engages in a conversation with Black youth—a severely neglected population of contemporary Black churches. He aims to bridge the chasm that Black Theology has often ignored. However, Andrews does not completely account for *how* contemporary Black churches *can* create a framework for liberating black youth while utilizing Hip Hop as a tool, which he claims can be used as a cultural asset for Black urban youth.<sup>202</sup> That very issue is addressed by Anne E. Wimberly who insists it is the churches that can create those liberating spaces for urban Black American youth.<sup>203</sup> Wimberly describes what faith formation looks like if the spiritual focus is on Black American youth who continue to “survive and thrive amidst crushing blows of racism, sexism, and class exploitation.”<sup>204</sup> Smith contributes images of

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<sup>202</sup> Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 38-39.

<sup>203</sup> Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and Evelyn L. Parker, *In Search of Wisdom Faith Formation in the Black Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010). Anne E. Wimberly is religious educator and professor of Christian education at the Interdenominational Theological Center.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

wisdom to meet the needs of young black males in a wisdom-directed model of Christian Educational ministry that extracts insights from African folk culture, African American culture, and Christian religious traditions.<sup>205</sup> In his insightful work, “Counsel from Wise Others: Forming Wisdom Through Male Mentoring” Trunell D. Felder informs religious educators who are assisting Black American males. As these young men struggle with issues of identity, self-identity and transformation, Felder’s counsel guides the educators’ attempts to actualize the image of God within the lives and self-images of Black youth.<sup>206</sup> Dr. Evelyn Parker creates frameworks within which religious educators strive to liberate Black American youth from negative identity issues, while simultaneously integrating what she and other scholars entitle the “triple travesty of race, class, and gender.”<sup>207</sup> This paper investigates and proposes answers to questions, such as: What narrative frameworks do practical theologians and religious educators create in efforts to teach youth what it means to be made in the image of God, when youth are faced with racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism? What happens when Black American youth experience predominantly white biblical characters in urban religious education spaces?<sup>208</sup> Are Black churches contributing to, or distorting, the image of God as it relates to Black American youths’ experiences of racism, homophobia, and classism?

Lastly, the paper focuses on the fact that issues of human sexuality and diverse sexualities in African American Christian churches and African American Muslim spaces have conveniently been omitted, with tragic consequences, from religious education, worship, and preaching. The result has been the perpetuation of physical, mental, and sexual violence against

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<sup>205</sup> Yolanda Smith, “Forming Wisdom through Cultural Rootedness,” in *In Search of Wisdom*, Wimberly and Parker, eds., 43. Dr. Smith is assistant professor of Christian education at Yale University Divinity School.

<sup>206</sup> Trunell D. Felder, “Counsel from Wise Others: Forming Wisdom Through Male Mentoring,” in Wimberly and Parker, 95-96.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

and even between African American and LGBTQI+ youth. This implicit teaching<sup>209</sup> by neglect negates the holistic wellness of the entire African American community. Aware of this problem, Dr. Pamela R. Lightsey adopts a womanist methodology that allows for the examination of categories such as race, gender, sexuality, and class to help religious educators establish holistic paradigms for doing queer theology for African American youth.<sup>210</sup> Lightsey's writings honor the importance of models that are inclusive of diverse sexualities and theological convictions whenever applicable. This paper will examine some church congregations that have been particularly hospitable to Black American LGBTQI+ youth. Lastly, this paper asks, what sources of wisdom that are found in Hip Hop music can be used in religious education Black American youth? How can we critically engage Hip Hop as a cultural and spiritual asset for Black American youth?

Tim Cresswell clarifies for our purposes how the concept of race is contextualized in the U.S. He contends that although race is not a biological concept, it is more than just a social construct, it is what Cresswell coins a "social fact."<sup>211</sup> Cresswell outlines his racial theory as it relates to how black people were labeled historically and continue to be pathologized in the present day. He writes,

There is no simple way to assign race following clear biologically based guidelines...Race refers to the way the world has been divided up according to skin color (associated biological "facts" such as intelligence or genotype ) in geographically and historically specific fashions. ...Race in this article, does not refer

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<sup>209</sup> John M. Bracke and Karen B. Tye, *Teaching the Bible in the Church* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 56–57.

<sup>210</sup> Pamela R. Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), xix. Dr. Lightsey is Associate Dean and Clinical Professor of Contextual Theology and Practice at Boston University.

<sup>211</sup> Tim Cresswell, "Black Moves: Moments in the History of African-American Masculine Mobilities." *Transfers* 6.1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.3167/TRANS.2016.060103>.

to a biological category or to any notion of ethnicity. Instead it refers to the reality of race as an active component of the lived experience of people in the United States. As a social construct, race, like gender, class or sexuality has real impacts on those who are labeled and it is necessarily lived on a daily basis. It is also the case that many people, especially black people, have chosen to define themselves racially in ways that are empowering.<sup>212</sup>

Cresswell continues,

While [race] is a dynamic phenomenon rooted in a political struggle, it is commonly observed as a fixed characteristic of human populations; while it does not exist in terms of human biology, people routinely look to the human body for evidence about racial identity; while it is a biological fiction, it is nonetheless a social fact.<sup>213</sup>

## Operational Terms

### 1. Youth

The United Nations writes “Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. The United Nations [definition of] Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.<sup>214</sup>

### 2. Black/African-American

African American refers to descendants of enslaved Black people who are from the United States. The reason we use an entire continent (Africa) instead of a country (e.g., Irish American) is because slave masters purposefully obliterated tribal ancestry, language, and family units in order to destroy the spirit of the people they enslaved, thereby making it impossible for their descendants to trace their history prior to being born into slavery.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> “What Do We Mean By ‘Youth’?,” *UNESCO Social and Human Sciences Youth*, accessed April 6, 2016, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>.

<sup>215</sup> Don C. Locke and Deryl F. Bailey, *Increasing Multicultural Understanding*, 3rd ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013).

Historian Ira Berlin writes:

After devoting more than 30 years of my career as a historian to the study of the American past, I've concluded that African-American history might best be viewed as a series of great migrations, during which immigrants—at first forced and then free—transformed an alien place into a home, becoming deeply rooted in a land that once was foreign, even despised. After each migration, the newcomers created new understandings of the African-American experience and new definitions of blackness. Given the numbers of black immigrants arriving after 1965, and the diversity of their origins, it should be no surprise that the overarching narrative of African-American history has become a subject of contention.<sup>216</sup>

### 3. African American/ Black Youth

The terms – African American youth and Black youth – will herein be used interchangeably when referring to the activities and behaviors associated with young people of ages 15-24 who are perceived or perceive themselves as belonging to the racial group of the pan-African diaspora. Herein African-Americans are those who share the historical forcible experience and deliberate orphanage of their ancestors who endured horrific treatment as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, and whose nation of origin is the United States. Quite apart from any label or category, African American youth as young human beings experience and exhibit the

attitudes, [cultural and spiritual resources]...of the young, urban black millennial, [it is my task] to explore how these factors and others influence their decision-making, norms, and behavior in critical domains such as sex, health, and [spirituality and religion]. Arguably more than any other subgroup of Americans, African American youth reflect the challenges of [racial, sexual] inclusion and empowerment in the post-civil rights period.<sup>217</sup>

### 4. Islam

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<sup>216</sup> Ira Berlin, "The Changing Definition of African-American," *The Smithsonian*, February 2010, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-changing-definition-of-african-american-4905887/>.

<sup>217</sup> Cathy Cohen, "The Black Youth Project," *The Black Youth Project*, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://blackyouthproject.com/about-us/history/>.

“Submission,” “surrender” Significant words in the Muslim religion; a monotheistic religion in which the supreme deity is Allah and the prophet is Muhammad ibn Abdullah.<sup>218</sup>

Professor Aminah McCloud writes,

Islam may be defined as the ongoing act of submitting one’s individual will to the Will of Allah, the sole Creator of all worlds.<sup>219</sup> Islam is extremely diverse in expressions amongst different communities across the world.<sup>220</sup> The Islamic worldview centers on what Muslims consider the last revelation from Allah to humankind-the *Qur’an*, which means “recitation”<sup>221</sup>

## 5. African American Islamic leadership

...some African Americans unequivocally chose Islam as their worldview in an environment where it was alien to the worldview of the majority population. Their embrace of a universal Islamic worldview was not in immediate conflict with their need to confront America’s racism and social injustice...Leaders were not chosen; rather leaders formed communities around their conceptualizations of answers to the mental, spiritual, economic, and emotional dilemmas of African Americans. This is important to note, because in the teachings of traditional Sunni Islam, leadership comes from a consensus of the learned regarding who is the most qualified (Sunni) or in the family of the leadership (same blood as Prophet Muhammad) has inherited the internal traits which the upbringing has augmented (Shi’i)....In African American communities,...the glue is the leader and his gifts.<sup>222</sup>

## 6. Masjid/African American Masjid (Mosque)

The place of prostration. Where Muslims gather to perform prayer and other community rituals and observances.<sup>223</sup> The space in Los Angeles where I conducted my ethnographic research is predominately African American, but there exist diverse ethnic groups who identify as Muslim who gather to worship and study there. The Iman is an African American male who follows the Sunni school of thought.

## 7. Imam

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<sup>218</sup> McCloud, *African American Islam*, 195.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 196.

The worship leader in the Muslim community among Sunni Muslims. The Imam provides religious guidance, and leadership. The Imam is recognized as holding religious authority among the congregation.<sup>224</sup> There are controversies surrounding women holding the office of imam. The imam leads prayers; however, community members can also perform the duty of prayer.

## 8. African American/Black Muslim

Aminah McCloud contends,

For African American Muslims at the turn of the century, there was a need to focus on the plight of black people in the United States and the daily injustices heaped on them. The tactics and the beliefs used to break ties with the larger society were seen as necessary to begin the process of culture formation, as was the designation of a contemporary messenger of God. How these African Americans appropriated Islam to fit their immediate condition and how they perceived what was necessary to change that condition[...]<sup>225</sup>

Edward E. Curtis IV states,

The African American Muslim community is even more diverse than it was in the 1960s and 1970s. Contemporary African American communities include black American members of immigrant-led mosque, African American devotees of Salafi and Wahhabi versions of Islam, African American Shi'is, African American Sufis, Five Percenters Sunni followers of Wallace D. Muhammad, members of the Moorish Science Temple, members of local Muslim student Associations, followers of Minister Louis Farrakhan, who reconstituted a version of the NOI in 1978. Many black Muslims are not associated with organized group. They are a part of a growing American Muslim community that may represent anywhere from two to eight million persons...While Jim Crow segregation may be gone, racial prejudice and institutionalized racism continue to affect nearly every aspect American life and the relationship of Americans to the rest of world. American racism is also a part of the American Muslim community, which, like nearly every other religious community in the United States, is divided by race...Many African American Muslims also feel that they are the victims of discrimination at the hands of nonblack Muslims.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Jeffrey R. Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ash'arism, and Political Sunnism* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 13, 60.

<sup>225</sup> McCloud, 40.

<sup>226</sup> Edward E. Curtis. *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 185-186.



African American Muslims are also frequently referred to as Black Muslims. This is a religious sect, composed of descendants of the African diaspora who occupy a minority status in the United States.<sup>227</sup> When constructing their spaces of worship, the primary concern of black leaders was nation building for their oppressed people.<sup>228</sup> It is important to engage such intersecting histories of African American Muslims and the broader history of African Americans born in the United States.<sup>229</sup> McCloud notes that African-Americans began to build and foster communities which they defined as Islamic in the early nineteen hundreds in America.<sup>230</sup> McCloud outlines four different elements that have helped African Americans establish Islamic communities in the United States,<sup>231</sup> which include the social and political climate of America with the oppressive regimes that impacted people of African descent.<sup>232</sup> She identifies Islamic retentions which are cultural traditions passed through generations through storytelling and naming and Muslim immigration.<sup>233</sup> Each of these elements influence the ideology that encompasses the Black Muslim faith. Throughout the early 1900s, Blacks were clear that they would not be protected by the federal government of the U.S. from lynching's and other brutalities. The Plessy vs. Ferguson legal decision to created "separate but equal" public accommodations like schools, hospitals, restaurants, public drinking fountains, toilets, and hotels while it enforced state-sponsored segregation. This decision in 1896 caused heightened ongoing

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<sup>227</sup> Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 48.

<sup>228</sup> McCloud, 4, 39.

<sup>229</sup> Sylvester A. Johnson, "African Americans and Religion." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, September 3, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.64>.

<sup>230</sup> McCloud, 9.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

racial and socioeconomic injustices between whites and blacks.<sup>234</sup> In response, blacks developed diverse survival strategies, to combat trauma and socioeconomic oppression.<sup>235</sup> These included but were not limited to, integration into mainstream America even though the possibilities of death were very real.<sup>236</sup> However, some blacks made trips back to Africa in efforts to sever ties with the U.S., while others created bridges to the larger Islamic world.

**Black Islamic Communities: 1900-1960**<sup>237</sup>

Moorish Science Temple	1913
Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam	1921
Universal Islamic Society	1926
First Muslim Mosque of Pittsburg	1928
Nation of Islam (NOI)	1930
Addeynu Allahe Universal Arabic Association	1930s
African American Mosque	1933
Islamic Mission Society	1939
State Street Mosque	1929
Fahamme Temple of Islam and Culture	1930s

**Contemporary Communities: 1960 to Present**<sup>238</sup>

Moorish Science Temple	R. Love El C. Kirkman Bey
Ahmadiyya Movement	First Pittsburgh Mosque
	First Cleveland Mosque
Nation of Islam	Nation of Gods and Earths
	Silis Muhammad
	Warith Deen Muhammad
	Louis Farrakhan
Darul Islam	Jamil al-Amin
	Fuqra
Islamic Party	Muzaffaruddin Hamid
Islamic Brotherhood	
United Submitted International	Rashad Khalifa
Shitte Communities	
Ansarullah Nubian Islamic	
Hebrews	
‘Isa al Haadi al Mahdi	
Naqshabandi Community	Sheik Nasim an-Naqshabandi

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

Tijaniyyah Community                      Sheik Hassan Cisse  
 Addeyualle Universal  
 Arabic Association  
 Fahamme Temple of Islam and Culture

## 9. Black Churches

Anthony B Pollard III defines the Black Church as:

a network of communities of faith in the United States, worship, and life born out of and informed by the historic experiences of people of African descent in this land. It has incorporated a host of sexual understandings or good and ill into its language and images, singing and preaching, worship and leadership patterns, into its assumptions about power and morality, and even in its definitions of membership.<sup>239</sup>

Errol Lamont Fields defines the Black Church as:

the seven Black Protestant denominations arising post-slavery as defined by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) in *The Black Churches in the African American Experience*. These are: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, National Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Church of God in Christ those “independent historic and totally Black controlled denominations.”<sup>240</sup>

Pamela Lightsey defines the Black Church as:

an identity, there is really no monolithic, all essentially like-minded community or group of persons that we can categorize as “Black people.” We can say, as ultimate truth, “The Black Church as one entity does not exist.” Therefore when we speak of “Black people” and “the Black Church” we are speaking of subjective constructs.<sup>241</sup>

Pamela Lightsey defines queer as:

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<sup>239</sup> Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds., *Loving The Body: Black Religious Studies and The Erotic*, Black Religion, Womanist Thought, Social Justice (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 318–319.

<sup>240</sup> Errol Lamont Fields, “Racial Identity, Masculinity and Homosexuality in the Lives of Young Black Men Who Have Sex With Men: Implications For HIV Risk,” (PhD diss., John Hopkins University, 2009), 157.

<sup>241</sup> Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter*, 22.

a term that does not always afford distinctions that are so simplistic. Queer is ambiguous not simply because it is being reclaimed in new ways but because it proposes that while sexuality is real, it should not be construed as taking one permanent form. To identify as queer is to assert a type of fluidity in life, particularly sexually. In fact, the fluidity of sexuality is the freedom of possibility, the possibility to be sexually attracted in multifarious ways. To wit, within the queer community, there is a faction of persons who are unwilling to be unrestricted to one fixed gender identity or category of sexual behavior. They argue that such ambiguity is an essential trait of queer folk. Male or female, heterosexual or homosexual, act of birth, or act of choice, are all elements of the study of sexuality that has entered into a new paradigm.<sup>242</sup>

## 10. Pathology

Pathology is the study of disease, especially of the structural abnormalities produced by disease. The word pathology comes from the Greek words *pathos*, meaning “suffering”, and *-logia*, “the study of.” In addition to describing the study of disease, the word pathology can also be used to describe characteristics of a disease itself (e.g. “the pathology of cancer”).<sup>243</sup>

## 11. Pathologize

Verb: **pathologize**; to regard or treat (someone or something) as psychologically abnormal or unhealthy.

## What is Practical Theology?

Practical theology is religious theory that engages with religious practices. Practical Theology is by nature reflexive, and communicates back and forth between theory and practice. Religious education and religious experience complement each other and participate in a tango style dance. Practical theology includes a theology that people rely on in daily situations. These beliefs do include sacred stories that are canonical and non-canonical. These stories do include, but are not limited to Hip Hop narratives, Hip Hop lyrics, Hip Hop beats, and bodily memories

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., xxii.

<sup>243</sup> “Pathology - Dictionary Definition.” Vocabulary.com, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/pathology>.

and motherly wisdom that are passed on from generation to generation of Afro-diaspora peoples. The Christian Bible, The Quran, and various other sacred texts are utilized as sources of spiritual wisdom, and utilized as interpretive frameworks for the experiences of oppressed Black people who encounter troubling circumstances. It should also be noted that our bodies are archival spaces for spiritual knowledge and Hip Hop wisdom is a practical source of wisdom. Hip Hop is a form of practical theology because its rap lyrics, syncopated beats, narratives, and rhythms assist Black youth with accessing theological revelation.

African American Professor of Homiletics, Social Justice, and Practical Theology, Dale

P. Andrews suggests that we should understand Practical Theology as:

Theology that attempts to bridge the chasm between theology that swings between living in the world and living in a faith community sometimes quite removed from the world. Practical Theology holds in deliberation theological revelation, theoretical science, and the practice of ministry. Therein exist a critical relationship between theology, theory, and practice.<sup>244</sup>

United Methodist cleric and author of *A Faith for the 21st Century* Martha Oldham argues,

...practical theology can be described as, “the use of theology in order to help people during hard times.”<sup>245</sup>

Oldham writes,

When I share inspiring scripture passages or stories that communicate experience, I am practicing my theology. The tradition of telling our faith stories is thus a tradition of [practical] theology. Practical theology is putting into practice the principles implied by a theological system...When we talk about [practical] theology, we are practicing theological principles and values in life.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>245</sup> Martha Oldham, *A Faith For the 21st Century: Practical Theology* (Enumclaw, WA: Wine Press Publishing, 2012), xi.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., xi.

Andrews notes that the process of *doing* practical theology is not linear, but is always oscillating. He explains practical theology as having a reflexive quality for which we use the term “praxis” for effective ministry within the Church.<sup>247</sup> He also illustrates that “in method, practical theology both feeds praxis and feeds upon it.”<sup>248</sup> We learn from Andrews that practical theological reflection anchors thinking theologically in everyday experiences of human beings.<sup>249</sup> In this way, theological reflection becomes the duty of the entire faith community instead of an individual, or individuals, far removed from the faith community.<sup>250</sup> In other words, theological reflection becomes both the corporate responsibility and the duty of the individuals.<sup>251</sup>

Andrews describes the relationship between the academy of Black theology and the Black churches) communities as a chasm.<sup>252</sup> Since this chasm exists, Andrews seeks to re-conceptualize the traditional perspective of the ecclesia as it relates to analyzing the social functions of the Black Church, its identity and uniqueness.<sup>253</sup> He believes Black theology has assisted in exposing the incongruences within the Church’s historical and prophetic roles that lead to the social and theological liberation of African Americans.<sup>254</sup> Despite the progression of Black theology, Andrews notes the existence of a continued gap between applying Black theology to practical matters within the present-day Church.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

By introducing a common hermeneutical paradigm for contemporary Black churches and Black theology, Andrews claims that he will bridge the chasm. However, regardless of his attempts to close the gap, he fails to do so because he neglects a huge population of Black churchgoers: queer youth. Andrews does not offer the common hermeneutic that he initially claims to provide as a practical response to struggles of the Black contemporary church. However, Andrews correctly argues that it is because of Hip Hop culture, specifically rap music, that Black American urban youth have “retain[ed] a degree of personal worth regardless of their social esteem,” however, he does not provide a common hermeneutic by which contemporary Black churches could bridge the chasm that he identifies. Andrews’s response should include the unique experiences of Black queer youth and explain how Black practical theologians – who Andrews calls the “Black academy” – can bridge this chasm by assisting Black churches to engage both urban Black youth males and LGTQI youth. I have chosen some Black scholars of practical theology, specifically Black religious educators and scholars from my cognate field (cultural studies), along with other scholars, to address the chasm. The scholars included in this paper are helping to create a framework for Black youth with diverse sexualities who continue to be neglected within Black contemporary churches.

In religious education spaces, being aware of *how* educators teach, is as salient as *what* educators teach. Pedagogy and the delivery of content in an effective manner – one that connects and resonates with the target audience—is as important as the content from which the lesson draws. One of the many methods through which religious educators impact youth in religious education spaces is via Sunday school and Bible study. John Bracke and Karen Tye<sup>256</sup> argue that much of what educators teach is intentional, but the rest of the content taught is not; there is the

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<sup>256</sup> John M. Bracke and Karen B Tye, *Teaching the Bible in the Church*. Atlanta, GA: Chalice Press, 2003, 56–58.

explicit content meant to be proclaimed, the implicit content is taught by how we construct the physical space and the way we utilize the time, and the way students relate to each other during the learning process.<sup>257</sup> The null curriculum is what we *do not* teach, or what we teach by what *we do not* say.<sup>258</sup> An example of the null curriculum according to Bracke and Tye would be not permitting students to ask questions of the educator. A great example of this curriculum at work is referenced in Lightsey's work about her experiences in a church in which she was "silenced" by the Black female pastor. Lightsey was forbidden to speak because "she asked too many questions" about the dress code for females in her denomination. Lightsey writes,

Being silenced meant I could not sing in the choir, teach, comment or ask questions during Sunday School, and I was denied the opportunity to stand and give my testimony during the highly regarded element of worship called "testimony service" What I had to say did not matter during the days of my punishment. I had said enough just by asking questions.<sup>259</sup>

Even though this incident happened many years ago, the null curriculum is still being taught in many Black Church communities. Questions being asked about God, sex, sexuality, and Hip Hop music are silenced when posed by teenage Black youth. Later in this work, I will discuss how the null curriculum damages youth vitality and church growth. Additionally, I will suggest different strategies that Black religious educators can use to create and welcome dialogue concerning questions raised by youth.

Yolanda Smith<sup>260</sup> writes that the implicit and null curriculum (my scaffolding) in Black religious spaces affects many people both physical and spiritually. Furthermore, Smith explains

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter*, x.

<sup>260</sup> Yolanda Smith, "Forming Wisdom through Cultural Rootedness," in *In Search of Wisdom*, Wimberly and Parker, eds., 40.



the difference between Eurocentric pedagogy and Afrocentric modes of learning and why the Eurocentric model is problematic for religiously educating minorities. For example, Smith conducts an ethnographic repository where she witnesses Eurocentric pedagogy taught to Black children, attempting to learn Scripture, in an all-Black Christian academy, in Atlanta.<sup>261</sup> Smith witnesses students reading Scriptures aloud, continuously, a routine effort to enable them to retain the information.<sup>262</sup> Smith opposes this pedagogy and concludes that it is very different than Afro-centric approaches to learning. Smith upholds Paul Hill's perspective instead, one that emphasizes Afro-centric approaches to learning, which requires the community to engage the subject matter together.<sup>263</sup> The supportive environment of an Afrocentric pedagogy assists with the elimination of competitiveness and lessens the probability that learners will be afraid of working together on common goals. Instead, learners become creative with each other, making learning fun and the acquisition of knowledge truly communal and educational. For example, learners can work together to compose a song by incorporating Bible verses. In this way, students are still using repetition to strengthen their retention. Pauline Lipman demonstrates how this occurs in academic settings that feature racial minorities in urban educational contexts.<sup>264</sup> Additionally, Smith witnesses how students are consistently presented with biblical characters who are Caucasian.<sup>265</sup> There is no mention of the Black presence in the Bible or in the biblical material that is presented to these Black children.<sup>266</sup> A later section will engage the implications for Black youth of not seeing themselves in the biblical characters, and the impact on them of not

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 40–42.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>264</sup> Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 103, 105, 127, 141.

<sup>265</sup> Smith, "Forming Wisdom", 42.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

seeing black Christian iconography (Black images of Jesus, Mary, and other saintly figures) in religious education spaces and contexts. Yolanda Smith cites Cain Hope Felder in her chapter “Forming Wisdom Through Cultural Rootedness” in *In Search of Wisdom*<sup>267</sup> about how the prominence of European culture in worship spaces teaches minority cultures that the dominant culture should be the lens through which everyone else should interpret the Bible, sacred narratives, and the world around us. According to Felder, African Americans, African Asiatic, Asian, and Hispanic people have typically been viewed as secondary to the ancient biblical narratives and that historically, the standard by which we read and interpret the Bible has been shaped by the dominant culture.<sup>268</sup> Amos Wilson points to the self-hatred and nihilism of Black males, tracing it directly to the implicit teaching of churches that everything Eurocentric is better than anything Black.<sup>269</sup>

Yolanda Smith writes that diverse teaching methods are not used in Black church classrooms on a weekly basis, but there is an incorporation of the Black wisdom tradition such as poetry, songs, rituals, stories, and historical accounts, into the happening on Sundays which are set aside for special heritage events.<sup>270</sup> Smith argues that these wisdom traditions should be available during daily church instructions in Black church settings as well, not just on special heritage days. Grant Shockley maintains that Christian education is the tool that allows Blacks to celebrate their faith and their cultural uniqueness and history.<sup>271</sup> Smith argues that Shockley’s perspective on what Christian education should be is contextual and assists with formulating ideas about being beloved creatures of God. This perspective of Christian education also

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<sup>267</sup> Wimberly, Anne Streaty, and Evelyn L. Parker, eds. *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in The Black Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002, 42.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 40–42.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 44–45.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 45.

encourages and affirms a positive religious, spiritual, and physical identity of Black Americans. Smith writes that wisdom formation is about developing positive self-knowledge and affirmation.<sup>272</sup> Shockley insists that Black liberation and womanist theology should be at the center of a holistic wisdom formation. In Shockley's view, this kind of wisdom formation points congregants toward a God who cares deeply for them, which, in turn, teaches Black Americans to care for all members of their community.<sup>273</sup> I begin to answer the question, how can Black Christian educators use the wisdom tradition to impact faith formation of African American youth consistently, not just on heritage days, or special occasion programs once a month. Pursuit of this question leads to a survey of diverse teaching methods for Black youth utilizing wisdom traditions of African, African American and indigenous populations.

**How Does the Black Wisdom Tradition Impact Faith Formation? What are attainable frameworks within which churches can create spaces for urban Black American youth?**

In "Singing Hope in the Key of Wisdom: Wisdom Formation of Youth" Evelyn Parker cites Grant Shockley's *Working with Black Youth*<sup>274</sup> as a resource for religious educators who desire to create a theoretical framework for assisting youth with formative experiences such as maturation, forming healthy relationships with same-sex and opposite sex peers, becoming independent from parents, and attaining other necessary life skills for adulthood. Shockley is convinced that the historical task of researching Black Methodist and Baptist Church origins in North America will benefit religious educators who work alongside youth to teach youth developmental skills. Shockley notes that this pedagogical assignment is important because it makes youth leaders familiar with "religious, social, and educational issues" that have impacted

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>274</sup> Grant Shockley, *Working with Black Youth: Opportunities for Christian Ministry*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

the development of African American church doctrines; it also teaches them about historical events that impacted Black Churches – including Civil Rights Movements. And, more importantly, this process will explain factors youth ministers should expect to encounter when dialoguing with Black youth. Evelyn Parker correctly argues that, by using Shockley's theoretical framework, educational ministers will familiarizing themselves with historical lessons from which Black youth will glean wisdom as they learn about youth involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Parker writes,

The Civil Rights Movement was a period of immense challenges to the self-identity, life direction, and beliefs of black people in general, and our youth in particular. Through what they did and what they sang, black youth in that movement showed evidence of religious ideological development. In the struggle for civil rights in both the North and South, youth fashioned a repertoire of values, beliefs and attitudes about the church, the way God acts, and the continuing struggle for black liberation among black people. In the South where the struggle was fiercest, says Shockley, "if it had not been for the leadership of men, women, and youth, and students, the majority of whom were members of the black churches, there would not have been a movement."<sup>275</sup>

It was the socio historical events of the Civil Rights movement that provided the context for the intense spiritual and political development of black youth. But there were some Black persons who didn't see themselves in the Civil Rights Movements despite the examples of the huge sacrifices made and the important progress which the Civil Rights Movements brought about. However, there are Black youth who cannot see themselves in the implicit curriculum of the Civil Rights Movement, but only on the fringes of it. Studying the Black Lives Matter Movement can allow today's religious educators to observe how some actions of the Civil Rights Movement were damaging and how the sexism, homophobia, and patriarchy that existed then and still exist can end up teaching a null curriculum, one which leads to silence and not liberation.

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<sup>275</sup> Evelyn L. Parker, "Singing Hope in the Key of Wisdom: Wisdom Formation of Youth," in Wimberly and Parker, *In Search of Wisdom*, 77.

Parker and Shockley argue that when it comes to the social, political, physical development of Black youth, it is wise to make use of the historical process which can assist religious leaders to become intimately familiar with the history of the Black Church's continuous struggle for liberation. Knowing this process aids youth in their own development. Engaging in this process of historical investigation is also important for religious educators because many Black youths today struggle with negotiating spaces of tension within social, religious, physical and sexual parameters, outside and inside the confines of Black Churches. For that reason, while it is important that youth should learn about historical movements, it is also important that they learn about current Black Movements that build upon the Civil Rights Movements of the past. They need to see how past events fed, nurtured and prepared for current events and how they complement each other. In other words, learning how other young Black activist of faith have responded historically and currently to challenging situations can provide practical application for improving maturation into adulthood and fostering healthy relationships within the lives of Black youth of diverse backgrounds. For example, the Black Lives Matter Movement is a movement that goes beyond the local church setting. While it is tremendously saturated and situated with Black youth who actively participate in Black churches, equally involved are youth from other religiously and non-religiously affiliated backgrounds.<sup>276</sup> The Black Lives Matter Movement also builds upon the Civil Rights Movements, and it also captures several black socioeconomic experiences, sexual identities, and expressions of faith of Black persons who were unable to see themselves in the Civil Rights Movements.<sup>277</sup>

The Black Lives Matter Movement defined as:

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<sup>276</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15, 182.

<sup>277</sup> The Editors, "Religion, Secularism, and Black Lives Matter," *The Immanent Frame*, September 22, 2016, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2016/09/22/religion-secularism-and-black-lives-matter/>.

Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. It goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.<sup>278</sup>

When religious educators include the Black Lives Matter Movement in their pedagogical process for understanding youth, Black youth can see themselves in the implicit curriculum of the contemporary Black Church's educational ministries. Black youth will not have to fret about being invisible in the dominant narratives of the Civil Rights Movements because the Black Lives Matters Movement captures those narratives which were marginalized in efforts to rebuild stronger and safer Black communities. Black youth who feel silenced by the strategies, structures, and organizations that perpetuated the null curriculum of the Civil Rights Movements are front and center in Black Lives Matter Movement. Religious educators can learn from this.

For example, strategic adviser for the Black Lives Matter movement, Elle Hearn<sup>279</sup> has become a leading voice for black trans people. During the convening for Black Lives in Cleveland this year, Hearn's emphasized to both protesters and participants "that true liberation calls for centering the experiences and voices of black trans folk, particularly black trans women." Hearn's story is important because Black trans women may not see themselves in the Civil Rights Movement. Many Black women and queer women were relegated to the furthest corners of the Movement and became a part of what Bracke and Tye refer to as the null

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<sup>278</sup> "Black Lives Matter Philadelphia Chapter," *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed November 7, 2018, [http://phlassembled.net/sovereignty/index/black\\_lives\\_matter\\_philadelphia\\_chapter/](http://phlassembled.net/sovereignty/index/black_lives_matter_philadelphia_chapter/).

<sup>279</sup> "About | Official Website of Elle Hearn," Elle Hearn, accessed December 27, 2018, <https://ellehearns.com/about/>.

curriculum.<sup>280</sup> It is imperative for Black youth to understand that much progress was made during the Civil Rights Movements, but many people still did not have a voice. Hearn's narrative builds on the Civil Rights Movement when she positions herself as a Black Lives Matter activist. When Black youth are transitioning to adulthood they learn about a multiplicity of Black experiences. More significantly, they learn that women like Hearn, a transgender woman, is a human being who experiences racism, sexism, and transphobia. Pedagogically, it is important for Black youth to recognize that these movements are made up of people with different expressions of sexuality and physical identities and abilities.<sup>281</sup> It is valuable for Black youth to learn that Hearn's tireless mobilization efforts – in spite of violence committed against her blackness – and her sexual identity combined to position her as a powerful force in politics just as the Black Lives Matter movement impacted the 2016 presidential race. In consequence of her experiences of racism, sexism, and transphobia, Hearn has also emerged as a powerful leader for Get Equal, an organization that empowers and mobilizes LGBTQI+ folk for legal and social equality. Hearn's experience of Blackness resides in a sea of diverse Black experiences. Henceforth her narrative and other narratives like hers of resilience, triumph, and communal activism should be inserted into our theological and our anthropological conversations about what it means to be made in the image of God when you are born queer and black. Womanist scholar Pamela Lightsey, writing about the struggles of being Black, female, and queer, asserts:

Womanhood expressed in normative femininity is an attribute (many but not all) Black queer women have struggled to possess and maintain within their own families and/or communities. Because gender performance is so critical to the psychological well-being of children growing up in the black community, by the time a Black queer female has reached adulthood she has fought many battles-literally, figuratively, and emotionally-to

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<sup>280</sup> Bracke and Tye, *Teaching the Bible in the Church*.

<sup>281</sup> "About," *Black Lives Matter*, accessed November 8, 2018, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

survive gender oppression and be healthy and whole individual. Add to this pain sexism, and racism [...]<sup>282</sup>

The primary questions Parker puts forth were asked by Black youth seeking wisdom in the past, and remain questions still being asked by youth today. Questions such as Who am I? and How should I live my life based on who I am? These questions lead to the inevitable question What do I believe? I argue that we cannot effectively discuss these questions without teaching about the historical attacks of racism, sexism, classism, and patriarchy on Black bodies in America. Utilizing a hybrid of narratives from the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement in a theoretical framework can assist both religious educator and learner to develop creatively sustainable liberatory tools that will enable youth survival and can provide them with a continuous thriving capacity for being young and Black in America.

During the Civil Rights Movements many Black leaders and organizers did not become widely known, either because they were women queer. It is because of their identities that they were unable to see themselves in the narrative of the Civil Rights Movement's explicit curriculum. Yet they continued to combat bigotry, even though they continued to be silenced as a part of the null curriculum. For example, Bayard Rustin was the leading strategist of the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 to 1968. He was the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He was also a practitioner of nonviolence during his time as an activist, but, as Lightsey notes, many of the Black clerics ostracized him and saw him as a liability because of his sexual identity. He remained quiet about his sexuality as he continued to engage in the collective fight for Black liberation.

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<sup>282</sup> Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter*, 33.



I argue that in efforts to bridge this chasm Andrews argues that<sup>283</sup> as their primary task practical theologians start where Black Theology left off by including the needs of Black youth in contemporary Black churches –including youth with diverse sexualities and diverse theological convictions. In efforts to bridge this chasm and to reach Black youth, leadership in Black Church(es) must holistically engage youth by responding to the question” How can contemporary Black churches create frameworks within which Black youth are allowed to fully and completely bring who they are, as they seek wisdom via in the Civil Rights Movement and the contemporary narratives of the Black Lives Movement. Only then will youth have the tools needed to accomplish their socio-economic, racial, sexual, identity and spiritual formation. Black youth need to be able to answer the questions that Parker puts forth, questions such as Who am I? and How should I live my life based on who I am? And the inevitable question What do I believe? These questions are already being formulated and answered first on a subconscious and later on a conscious level by Black youth in the environment of contemporary Black America as natural and inevitable responses to the socioeconomic and built environments that surround them. For example, Professor Tricia Rose has written about youth utilizing the built environment as a source of alternative identity formation and socioeconomic status, and refers to the creation of Graffiti art, a dimension of the Hip Hop culture, at a time when their community in the South Bronx was being destroyed by wealthy political ambitions. Rose writes,

Hip hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status for youth in a community whose older local support institutions had all but been demolished along with large sectors of its built environment.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*.

<sup>284</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Music/Culture (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994). Rose is Chancellor’s Professor of Africana Studies and Director of the Center for Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

Alternative local identities were forged in fashions and language, street names, and most important, in establishing neighborhood crews or posses.<sup>285</sup>

The collections of various forms of art that have been created by the youth subculture of Hip-Hop is a clear indication that youth are already crafting spaces for themselves in the secular world.

As religious educators, we should provide liberatory tools to help youth realize that, in addition to youth centers and street corners, Black Church edifices are also a built environment where they can become critical consumers of mass media, politics, religious doctrines and their faith experiences. Black Churches are spaces where youth can formulate and digest their conscious and subconscious thoughts about their experiences of racism, sexism, and ageism in Black urban America. Hip Hop will be presented as a liberatory tool, which, according to Andrews, has been a cultural asset for Black urban youth. But going further, Hip Hop can function as a liberatory tool to combat racism, sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, ageism, and classism that exist even inside the walls of predominantly Black Churches and mosques. Shockley's theoretical framework will be used to analyze the needs of Black youth in contemporary America. Historical and contemporary pedagogical art forms have been relied on by African Americans to transmit Black theology, as well as ideas about liberation, Christian hope, faith, suffering, and joys that are related to faith/spiritual formation in many Black spiritual communities. Both Parker and Shockley employ Gospel Rap and Gospel Hymns as ways to foster black liberation and Christian hope for Black youth. Narratives from the Civil Rights Movements and Black Lives Matter Movement can be taught to religious educators, after which religious educators can work to create space to which youth can a) bring their authentic selves

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 271.

while b) being critical consumers of these narratives. Prepared religious leaders can serve as guides for faith and spiritual formation. This present research study alongside Black contemporary youth, as part of the effort to employ what Shockley terms the “spirit of creativity,” will include orals, spirituals, hymns, poems, prison letters, and Hip Hop blogs, all liberatory tools that religious educators can use to guide Black youth as they confront racism, ageism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.

**How are Black churches contributing to a positive or a distorted image of God as it relates to Black American youth's experiences of racism, sexism homophobia, and classism?**

### **Identity and self-definition**

This section will analyze the different pedagogical models religious educators can include in the spiritual formation for African American youth. African American pastor and author Trunell Felder writes about the stereotypes that Black men internalize from dominant society, and how these negative stereotypes influence their self-identity. Felder argues that the stereotype of the Black male as lazy, brawny, angry, violent, big, and stupid, all began during slavery and is perpetuated by authority figures. Black men’s social status has stagnated under the assaults on their Blackness by a racist society. Furthermore, Felder believes that this stagnation can be minimized if Black Churches take seriously the empowering and liberating effects that the male mentoring process has on the spiritual formation of black lives. In efforts to develop a positive identity, Felder believes one must focus on who and whose we are. He argues that without access to mentors (older and wiser Christian Black males) Black men will not have “a

clear platform for wisdom formation.”<sup>286</sup> He argues that the because many Black men have failed to receive insight and spiritual wisdom from wise elders, they have become susceptible to accepting the stereotypes and negative lifestyles instead of achieving positive spiritual development.

Equally true is the fact that African American females are also at risk because of the barrage of negative narratives that address their self-identification and spiritual formation. These perpetuated images of Black women usually involve hyper-sexuality, anger, and the attitudes of a “gold-digger”<sup>287</sup> or “jezebel.”<sup>288</sup> Patricia Hill Collins writes about how Black women are stereotyped and shamed as hyper-sexed beings. Collins writes,

From the display of Sara Bartmann as a sexual “freak” of nature in the early nineteenth century to Josephine Baker dancing bare-breast for Parisian society to the animal skin bikinis worn by “bootylicious” Destiny’s Child to the fascination with Jennifer Lopez’s buttock, women of African descent have been associated with animalistic “wild” sexuality.<sup>289</sup>

Furthermore, these racist and sexist narratives are also exaggerated by the mass media and law enforcement as well. Author Tamara Winfrey-Harris,<sup>290</sup> writes about these challenges and the stereotypical portrayals of black women and she highlights the need for fair, nuanced, and complex portrayals of characters by the media.

In addition to Winfrey-Harris’ assertions, I believe that there can be nuanced healthy representation of diverse African American youth crafted by religious educators in contemporary

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<sup>286</sup> Trunell D. Felder, “Counsel from Wise Others: Forming Wisdom through Male Mentoring” in Wimberly and Parker, *In Search of Wisdom*, 90.

<sup>287</sup> Tamara Winfrey Harris, *The Sisters Are Alright: Changing the Broken Narrative of Black Women in America*, First edition, (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015), 31.

<sup>288</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “Controlling Images and Black Women’s Oppression,” Reading 45 in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2009), 08.

<sup>289</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. 1 edition. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 27.

<sup>290</sup> Tamara Winfrey-Harris, *The Sisters Are Alright: Changing the Broken Narrative for Black Women in America* (2015). Winfrey-Harris is a longtime journalist and blogger specializing in race and gender interpretation in culture and current affairs.

Black Churches. The key is for religious educators to display a multiplicity of “platforms for wisdom” and spiritual formation that will represent youth of different sexual identities and theological perspectives. In many ways, the mentorship process for Black males is similar, but also very different from what this study will propose. In light of generation gaps and power differentials that may be found in mentorship processes due to age, class, and theological leanings between Black youth and older religious educators, I argue that Black religious educators work with Felder’s mentoring pedagogy and strengthen the reciprocity of his model. Through the hierarchical subjugation of Black youth that occurs in mainstream society, which also penetrates many Black Churches because of generational differences in social norms, older mentors should allow reciprocity in the mentoring process. Anthony Reddie states

The important role of the educational ministry leader is to emphasize the imperative use of an open dialogical method between adult and child and to demonstrate this method. There is a critical need for a pedagogy that emphasizes the role of adults and children as co-learners. ...no one individual should dominate the conversation or the other.<sup>291</sup>

Pedagogically, the mentor in Felder’s and Reddie’s views functions as the guide to, rather than the source of, wisdom. The mentor actually serves as a model of wisdom and a facilitator of the seeker’s quest for wisdom. Therefore, older religious educators should not claim to have ultimate access to spiritual wisdom nor testify to sole proprietorship of the image of God. It is important to note that Shockley advocates for the liberation praxis model of Christian education.<sup>292</sup> This is referred to as Intentional Engagement Model, which builds upon the work of James Cone, Paulo Freire, and Gayraud Wilmore. Like Freire,<sup>293</sup> Shockley maintains that

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<sup>291</sup> Anthony G. Reddie, “Forming Wisdom through Cross-Generational Connectedness,” in *In Search of Wisdom*, eds. Wimberly and Parker, 71.

<sup>292</sup> Kenneth Hill, *Religious Education in the African American Tradition: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Chalice Press, 2007), 130.

<sup>293</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 219.

education is never neutral in Black religious spaces.<sup>294 295 296</sup> Learners are always building on sources that have already been learned theologically, socially, and psychologically.

Felder argues that Genesis 1:26 makes explicit reference to identity and self-definition because it makes reference to *imago Dei*, the idea that human beings are made in God's image. From a biblical perspective, although impaired by sin because of the Fall, the image of God is restored to its fullness in humans by the grace of Christ. This is the attribute that allows humans to bear the image and likeness of God. The phrase *imago Dei* is used in theological anthropology to define the dignity and responsibility of human beings.<sup>297</sup> African American author, activist, and blogger Jemar Tisby has said—"It is important for religious educators to know that Biblical teachings on the image of God guide our thoughts about race."<sup>298</sup> Tisby illustrates how "racism, in both its explicit and implicit manifestations, denigrates the image of God in other human beings."<sup>299</sup> Yet patriarchy, classism, and sexism have equal impact capacity as does the trauma of racism that causes the implosion of Black bodies in America. Furthermore, many people move through American society with what African American scholar Claudia Jones coined triple oppressions, or multiple categories of oppression existing at the same time for one human

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<sup>294</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas et.al., *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 175.

<sup>295</sup> Anthony G. Reddie, "Transformative Pedagogy, Black Theology and Participative Forms of Praxis." *MDPI, Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute*, 18 Oct. 2018, [www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/10/317](http://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/10/317).

<sup>296</sup> Walter Brueggemann and Amy Erickson, "Canon and the Educational Repertoire," In *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2015), 1-18.

<sup>297</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 123-125.

<sup>298</sup> Jemar Tisby, "The Image of God and the African American Experience- Part 1," *The Witness*, December 3, 2014, <https://thewitnessbcc.com/image-of-god-african-american-pt-1/>.

<sup>299</sup> Jemar Tisby, "The Reformed African American Network (RAAN)," Archive, *The Image of God and The African American Experience Part 1*, December 3, 2014. <https://www.raanetwork.org/image-of-god-african-american-pt-1/>.

being.<sup>300</sup> These intersecting identities (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, class) impact the identity of people, and these oppressions cannot be easily divorced from one another. For example, a poor, Black, female, lesbian can simultaneously experience multiple levels of oppression, as it relates to her race, class, gender, and her sexual identity.

African American Churches and African American Masjids are challenged with understanding the ways in which religious educators should conduct anthropological work that emphasizes the doctrine of creation when, historically, these teachings have largely been confined to Western European and Anglo-Saxon cultures. *What is useful and what is not?* The question is frequently asked by Pan African theologians and bible scholars, in what ways are Black people like God in a world that is anti-Black? My question as it pertains to this question is, how can Black religious educators and practical theologians teach African American youth the ways in which they are crafted in God's image? We can look at womanist scholar Delores S. Williams' *Surrogacy and Survival* for a remedy.<sup>301</sup> Williams positions God as gifting Mary with God's Spirit first, (and intentionally considering Mary, a Black woman, as Jesus' mother) allows for a powerful re-interpretation of the incarnation narrative. Williams' work teaches Black religious educators how the act of re-imagining Mary as the first incarnation, rather than the incarnation traditionally only happening in Jesus, further empowers Black women, and commemorates Black women as nurturers of sacred beings and wisdom producers. It allows Black women to understand and solidify their position as divine nurturers, and spiritual wisdom

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<sup>300</sup> Denise Lynn, "Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 1-20. doi:10.14321/jstudradi.8.2.0001.

<sup>301</sup> Delores S. Williams, "Surrogacy and Survival," in *Racism and the Image of God*, ed., Karen Teel, Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 92-95.

producers in God's economy, in a world that degrades and demeans them.<sup>302 303 304 305 306 307 308</sup>

<sup>309 310 311</sup> Through this re-interpretation of the biblical narrative, Black mothers have the power to understand that God views them as nurturers and transmitters of the divine genetic DNA, which includes spiritual and cultural wisdom as well. Mary made this transmission possible by being the first conduit of God's Spirit; therefore, Mary is the initial birther of religious cultural wisdom. With Williams' fresh re-interpretation of the incarnation process, we are reminded of communal transmission of knowledge, and the fact that God's spirit dwells with ordinary human beings, like Black mothers and Black children. With this knowledge, we are also called to think critically about whether or not God has called Black people to suffer in our physical bodies.

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<sup>302</sup> Keka Araujo, "Black Nurse Allegedly Racially Profiled While Caring for Patient," *DiversityInc*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/Organizational-Misbehavior/black-nurse-allegedly-profiled-racially>.

<sup>303</sup> Sheryl Estrada, "Black Doctor Killed by Ex-Fiancé at Chicago Hospital," *DiversityInc*, November 21, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/tamara-oneal-doctor-killed>.

<sup>304</sup> Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, 1st Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

<sup>305</sup> Rebecca Moore, "The Demographics of Jonestown – Alternative Considerations of Jonestown & Peoples Temple," accessed December 23, 2018, [https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page\\_id=35666](https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=35666).

<sup>306</sup> Frank Kineavy, "Bully Tells Black Students They Would Be Sold Into Slavery," *DiversityInc*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/bully-horizon-christian-school>.

<sup>307</sup> Laurel Wamsley, "'One Must Respect The Game': French Open Bans Serena Williams' Catsuit," NPR.org, accessed December 27, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/08/24/641549735/one-must-respect-the-game-french-open-bans-serena-williams-catsuit>.

<sup>308</sup> Sheryl Estrada, "White Kansas Official Tells Black Women He Belongs to the 'Master Race': Video," *DiversityInc*, November 18, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/klemp-kansas-master-race>.

<sup>309</sup> "Family of 3-Year Old Girl Who Had Gun Pointed at Her by Chicago Police Is Awarded \$2.5 Million Settlement," accessed December 27, 2018, <http://www.blacknews.com/news/family-davianna-simmons-3-year-old-girl-gun-pointed-chicago-police-awarded-25-million-settlement/>.

<sup>310</sup> "After Being Missing For 2 Weeks, 15-Year Old Black Girl From Chicago Found Dead and Mutilated," accessed December 27, 2018, <http://www.blacknews.com/news/sadaria-davis-15-year-old-black-girl-from-chicago-reportedly-found-dead-and-mutilated/>.

<sup>311</sup> "13-Year Old Black Girl Needed a Heart Transplant After Being Brutally Attacked by a White Man," accessed December 27, 2018, <http://www.blacknews.com/news/dorika-uwimana-black-girl-needed-heart-transplant-after-being-brutally-attacked-white-man/>.



### **Black Motherhood as Imaging God**

Earlier, this paper examined how womanist scholar Pamela Lightsey's writings teach Black religious educators how to integrate life-giving messages alongside transgender, bisexual, gay, and lesbian Black youth and their parents in religious communities. Next, we will examine womanist scholar Delores Williams' writings that describe how Black mothers currently embody the doctrine of *imago Dei*. Furthermore, Williams' re-telling of the incarnation story provides a pedagogical framework for Black mothers in religious communities to help Black youth become aware of their divine genetic code.

When crafting pedagogical themes around how African American churches can understand the ways in which religious educators should conduct anthropological work that emphasizes the doctrine of creation, Williams' work is seminal. Williams stresses the importance of the embodiment of spiritual wisdom and how wisdom can be accessed from inside one's self. This is very empowering and liberating for Black youth as they create their self-definition, and engage in spiritual formation to learn that there is divine wisdom in their physical and spiritual bodies originating from the highest source of strength. This allows for Black youth to know that they have the power to think, speak, and act out their dreams, in this current world, equal to other youth whom are told that they are greater than they. Williams' writings teaches that the Black body was made by God, and God labeled it good. Therefore, youth should not only understand this concept, but put into praxis the awareness of it. This is one of the Black urban millennial's greatest spiritual resources for combating the racism, sexism, ageism, classism and violent stereotypes of Blackness they learn from the media.

Wimberley writes that Black church leaders and educational ministries should be important points of reference when Black youth are looking for answers concerning sex,

sexuality, and sexual practices. Which religious leaders and educational ministries are willing to step up and out to provide much needed resources for Black youth (of all sexualities and genders)? Bracke and Tye<sup>2</sup>s provide an excellent example of how people learn by what educators do not say. This is definitely true concerning sex and sexuality in Black church communities. Pamela Lightsey goes further than Wimberly; she assists by actualizing Wimberly's point for religious leaders and educational ministries for Black churches who desire to engage Black youth of all sexualities and genders. Lightsey maintains that religious leaders should create innovative ways to learn specifically about the experiences of Black LGBTQI+ women in our religious education spaces; additionally, I submit that Lightsey's groundbreaking text deconstructs Black sexuality and the nature of Black homophobia in general, and her poignant arguments can be used to liberate Black churches that disenfranchise Black youth of all sexualities and genders. As Lightsey so eloquently writes, the disenfranchisement of Black women intersects with the disenfranchisement of Black men, and I argue that the disenfranchisement of black boys intersects with the disenfranchisement of Black girls. The church continues to perpetuate much of the disenfranchisement that black queer youth experience. Lightsey writes,

We need to learn from the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Black women how the church has been helpful and hurtful. We also need to discover how we as scholars can help train a new generation of clergy and faculty to affirm LGBTQ persons as people who God loves as they live out their lives as same gender loving persons. To meet this task, Black women [and men] must play a more immediate role in liberation theology by writing what it means to be queer bodies shaped in the image of God...<sup>312</sup>

In conclusion, black church ministries should include an Afrocentric perspective in every aspect of the different ministries of the church, especially for Black church youth. Felder underlines the importance of wisdom formation in mentoring Black males in a Christian church. I acknowledge that the mentoring process is a resource for the young, urban Black millennial,

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<sup>312</sup> Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter*, 3.

but there are other resources including one's own body. Delores Williams assists us with exploring how the Black body as a site of the incarnation and spiritual embodiment can be a platform for influence for youth decision-making, norms, and behavior in critical domains such as sex, health, and politics. Arguably more than any other subgroup of Americans, African American youth reflect the challenges of inclusion and empowerment in the post-civil rights period.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Some dominant methodologies that cultural studies scholars have used to study the politics of popular culture include the following: 1) Hannah Arendt used philosophical and political theories to discuss the way in which humans interact with the Greek Polis and the Greek hierarchy in Western philosophical traditions in her work, *The Human Condition* (1958). 2) Henry Louis Gates Jr. used historical methods and Black literary methods in his work, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, (1988). 3) In her work, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (1995), Jacqueline Bobo used ethnographic methods, interviewing methods, media studies techniques, and historical methods to understand how black women observe themselves when they are presented as subjects whose roles have been scripted by Europeans in film and on mainstream television. 4) Frantz Fanon, in his work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2005), used post-colonial theories and philosophy to study the politics of Algerian colonialism, and used psychoanalysis to explain how colonialism affects the colonized mentally and physically. 5) Eric Williams used financial analysis to examine the horrors of slavery in Bristol and Liverpool and West India in his work, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1994). 6) Tricia Rose used sociopolitical methods, media analysis, interviews, and cultural analysis of the governmental politics of the South Bronx, New York to describe the dynamics of poverty, the educational system, gang violence, and the family structures that influence Black and Latino youth, and Hip Hop as a youth subculture in her work, *Black Noise: Rap Music in Contemporary America* (1994) 7) Angela Davis used media studies, historical events, narratives, and political analysis, feminist theory, and racial theories to explain the connection between racism, sexism,

and classism in popular culture locally and globally in her work *Women, Culture, and Politics* (1990). One of the controversial topics in this work is her scholarly critique of the demeaning Moynihan Report which was designed during the Lyndon B. Johnson Era by Johnson's Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Moynihan, who pathologized African American familial structures.<sup>313</sup> The Moynihan Report is discussed in greater depth below by Nikol Alexander-Floyd as she describes what she maintains is contributing to the Black Cultural Paradigm. 8) Toni Morrison used literary analysis of classical European literature to uncover and explain how blacks are used as caricatures in patterns that are racist and degrading. In Toni Morrison's work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), she explains how European writers exploit blacks by creating dark shadowy figures that are sexually repulsive are positioned directly opposite virtuous, saintly, angelic white literary figures<sup>314</sup>. 9) In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Dubois used Biblical symbols, Spiritual hymns, Southern narratives, his personal memoir, and historical events, all to explain the horrors of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and sub-par education in the American South where he taught. He used these methods to write about racism and the horrors of lynching, and the fact that the legal segregation of black and white residents in the south did not allow for his child to be buried in a humane way. 10) In Judith Butler's *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (1994), she used media advertisements and cultural studies and economics to uncover the appeal of material goods in advertisements in relationship to how we think about ourselves and how this affects

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<sup>313</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Culture & Politics*, 81-86.

<sup>314</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage, 1993, 54-55.

what we purchase and why. Butler describes how messages are conveyed via technologies to ensure ongoing currency exchanges.<sup>315</sup>

There are some advantages and some limitations connected with the research methods chosen. For example, Eric Williams's research limited his view on the multifaceted horrors of slavery by choosing to focus only on the financial viability of the slave trade. His research has been used primarily as evidence for an economic argument in support of slavery and his research perpetuates a reductionist perspective of a huge and cruel institution that ruined millions of individuals and families. Even though Williams is not necessarily arguing in favor of slavery, his argument regarding the financial and economic utility of slavery continues the narrative that is perpetuated by many in order to justify slavery as an economic necessity. Eric Williams would have retained more of the humanity and authenticity of the many generations of blacks that were destroyed physically and psychologically by taking Amos Wilson's approach. Harriet Jacobs, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), presented the narratives of black women who endured slavery, and explains the loss of families and lives. The book also explains the spiritual and psychological trauma of a group of black women who are raped and used as breeders for their white slave masters, and the ongoing generations that carry the remnants their trauma, endurance, and survival. The author describes the horrific beating of slaves, and how difficult and unbearable the journey under a slave master.<sup>316</sup> The research methods utilized by W.E.B. Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) paint a detailed picture of the totality of slave religion. He explains how spiritual strength was used as a form of resistance and a means of survival. He also describes in a detailed narrative the lynching of Sam Hose near Atlanta. The methodology of

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<sup>315</sup> Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, Reissue ed. (London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 1994), 25.

<sup>316</sup> Harriet Jacobs, Myrlie Evers-Williams, and Dawn Lundy Martin, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Reissue ed. (New York: Signet, 2010), 48-50.

Eric Williams is limited in comparison, and it would have been enhanced by a postmodern approach to his research.

Next, Toni Morrison's literary analysis would have been stronger if she had used interviews of people who had shared how they felt about the modes in which European literature portrays blacks in their work places, that these classical stories are in high school curriculums, and colleges all over the country. Toni Morrison's book provides black people with the understanding of how popular culture produced in the academic study of literature is written by people who differ from them. It also makes clear how Western European literature—which is set as authoritative and fixed—influences corporate structures, political structures, cultural ideas. Fictional ideas about blacks and other minorities, and about the poor are cleverly constructed to seem true to life. Morrison might have done better had she employed ethnographic research and interviews as did Jacqueline Bobo. BoBo's approach was superlative in the sense that she utilized historical information on powerful black women like Harriet Wilson, author of *Our Nig*, who, in 1859, was the first published African American novelist. In this work she illustrates young black women to whom Bobo applies the phrase “interpretive community,”<sup>317</sup> referring to those who have the power to encourage and inspire their own life narratives. Moreover, she uncovers the relationship between the media and corporate influence by describing to these black women interviewees how a rich, Jewish, man, totally removed from their racial and cultural context is given the power and media influence to reimagine a film originally written by a black women, Alice Walker, and how the main three characters Celie, Sophia, and Shug who are originally black women who fight against oppression, are erased and turned into stereotypical Black caricatures. BoBo created a space for the “interpretive community,” these intelligent

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<sup>317</sup> Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 22.

young black women to articulate their own thoughts and opinions as they watched a movie scripted by racist, sexist, classist images that work against them. If Morrison would have used this approach by inviting young Black high school or college age women and men and providing a space to become an interpretive community, they could have learned to better understand the relationships between media, corporate influence, political structures, and cultural ideas.

Many authors on this list attempt to make visible the ideas of race, class, and gender that popular culture has set before us as authoritative and fixed. These authors challenge gender stereotypes and racist representations in various media locales. These authors describe the process by which their ideological critical work is performed and the way in which the authors show how culture produced for mass consumption seeks to erase differences and to make certain sexist, racist classist and colonial representations seem natural.

**In his book, *The Signifying Monkey, A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*,** Henry Louis Gates Jr. uses his historical and literary critical methods in to point out the inaccuracy and variability of the ideas of race, class, and gender that popular culture frequently tries to portray as authoritative and fixed. For example Gates calls to account the academic study of literature which he describes as racist and sexist in its presentation of what it claims are standards of English and literary language. Gates writes that Western Europeans make the presumption that they invented the English language and thus can monopolize how it is used. When analyzing Black literature, Gates argues that Black literature is based on theories that are embedded within the literature, and needs no assistance from outside Western literary tradition. Gates refers to Western literary theories as “culturally hegemonic.”<sup>318</sup> He describes terms like

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<sup>318</sup> Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Reprint ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xiv.



“literary canon”<sup>319</sup> as irrelevant because they are not suitable for analyzing Black literature which contains its own literary analysis. Western Europeans claim that Black English is not an official or standard way of speaking. Gates writes that this is an erasure of difference and a racist representation of a vernacular language, because Black vernacular language differs from what is supposedly authoritative and fixed in the academic study of English language. Gates argues that Black Vernacular has a very wide and growing community. Additionally, historically Black Vernacular was a form of secret coded communication utilized by slaves on plantations as a valuable language tool and resource for planning escape routes to freedom from slavery. I want to argue that African American Vernacular English (or AAVE) is an example how Western English tradition attempts to erase not only racial differences, but also class differences. Black English is spoken by urban working class Americans and it is a mix of English and Creole. This language, also called Ebonics, and spoken in majority of minority neighborhoods similar to my own Southeast Atlanta neighborhood. Many scholars of popular culture discuss the far-reaching influence Hip Hop culture has had on the entertainment industry as well as on the globalized society which we inhabit. Mainstream culture and big brand corporations – like Nike, Sprite and Pepsi, Forever 21 – utilize Hip Hop language in media advertisements, and commercials taking advantage of Hip Hop’s influence to produce endless profits for themselves. *Forbes* magazine media and entertainment contributor, Ogden Payne, writes that in the year 2020 Hip Hop culture will dominate three major sectors of our society, which includes: politics, education, and corporate America. Payne continues, “MSNBC’s *The Beat* host Ari Melber often references ... lyricists, as well as rappers such as Drake, Kanye West, Lauryn Hill and Rick Ross, when

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., xiv, xxiv.

reporting on current political events.”<sup>320</sup> This is evidence of Hip Hop’s influential outreach into America’s political sphere. Furthermore, Payne offers a scathing critique of the corporations and white elites who profit from Black culture. Payne challenges the way Hip Hop culture is being consumed and commodified, while its producers and creators, Black people, are not receiving equal profits from its commercialization. Payne utilizes his piece to shed light on how rare it is for Blacks to reap benefits from the cultural work they accomplish. The problem of Black cultural appropriation and reification of white supremacist politics are dissected and challenged by Payne. As it relates to the co-opting of many elements of Hip Hop culture by big name companies who rake in the profit, Payne revisits the question posed by Billboard in April of 2018. Payne writes, “Despite hip hop’s prominent presence in pop culture and status as a preferred genre to listen to . . . . Why hasn’t the hip-hop boom pushed more black executives to the top?”<sup>321</sup> Ironically, popular culture and media reproduce existing relationships between dominant and subordinate groups, relegating Hip Hop as avant-garde, but utilizes Hip Hop’s social capital to make profits.

Similarly, Gates points out that news camera crews and brand name companies capitalize, in an exploitative fashion, on Black Vernacular language usage to increase their television ratings, which ultimately turn into profits. The narrative being reproduced says persons who actually use this Vernacular to communicate belong to a lower class and uneducated minority. This unethical racist practice – by news journalists and by branding companies alike – teaches the public to accept a message that is demeaning, one that devalues the humanity of minority

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<sup>320</sup> Ogden Payne, “3 Areas Of Society Hip-Hop Culture Will Dominate By 2020,” *Forbes*, accessed January 10, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ogdenpayne/2018/05/24/3-areas-of-society-hip-hop-culture-will-dominate-by-2020/>.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

communities who utilize “incorrect” language. Black Vernacular is a viable language; its growth is a proud sign of Black difference. Gates argues that Black Vernacular English is a consequence of the “blackness of the tongue.”<sup>322</sup>

The racist representation of Africans in the 1700s and beyond when a European merchant and explorer named Willem Bosem explored the Ghanaian Gold coast and recorded his findings in a journal that is now considered authoritative in Western European circles. Bosem writes that he found no evidence of writing among the African residents. Since in efforts to write one would have to first be mentally equipped to conduct rational thought, he concluded that Africans were unintelligent and lacking in rationality. Since Bosem didn’t make any observations about or see any evidence of writing from the people during his travels, Bosem deemed the African residents to be subhuman. Bosem’s journal entries, later considered authoritative, led to the myth that African people were, in fact, unable to produce writings. Gates also reports the myth, assumed to be true by Europeans, that Africans were greedy and that avarice filled their hearts. Therefore, since Africans allegedly wanted only to attain gold and riches, the Africans were cursed by God with not being capable of attaining knowledge and logic. Gates identified these as ideas about the Black race that both popular culture and the academic world were ready to accept as authoritative and fixed. Gates challenges racist thinking that depicts African people as subhuman, primitive, lacking rational thought, and writing skills. He first discusses the Chain of Being which positions Africans on the bottom of the hierarchy, which identifies them as subhuman.

This actual scientific document was designed to make colonial representations of Africans and the Trans-Atlantic slavery seem natural and justifiable. Gates points to an African

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<sup>322</sup> Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, xix.

trickster figure in Black literature, Esu, Egba, Papa Leba. As slaves made the forced journey to different lands, the trickster's identity changed with the move from country to country. This trickster narrative served different purposes for the differing groups who used it as a way to resist the violent oppression of their slave masters. First, Gates notes that markings were made on Palm nuts by those who practiced African divination and ancestor worship with the African priest. Gates described these as dated before modern writings. He describes them as coded enigmas and encryptions that were interpreted by the person for whom the message was intended.

These encoded messages are definite evidence that contradict the Western European representations of African culture and language tools. Lastly, many cultural representations continue to perpetuate male privilege, patriarchy, sexism, and classism. Unfortunately, the media continues to regard as subordinate to men, and homosexuals and people with diverse sexualities being subordinate to heterosexuals. The heterosexual normativity discourse continues to be presented as the natural narrative. Gates continued challenge to gender stereotypes is seen clearly in his use of photographs and historical representations of a popular Black cultural mythical figure that is neither male nor female. In Gate's book, it is seen to have a breast and a huge phallus. He describes the main trickster figure as sexually ambiguous and a symbol of freedom and liberation. Gates republished the novel, *Our Nig*, written in 1859 by an African American woman, Harriet Wilson. He refutes critics who claim that Wilson did not write the novel and who attempt to attribute the authorship to a white male.

Angela Davis, in her work, *Women, Politics, and Class* (1990), also challenges the ideas of race, class, and gender that popular culture has arbitrarily set as authoritative and fixed. Davis challenges gender stereotypes and racist representations in the media. In her book, she describes the process by which ideological work is performed and the way in which culture produced for

mass consumption seeks to erase difference and to make sexist, racist classist and colonial representations seem natural.

Davis begins her scholarly pursuits by combining her veganism (the way she treats animals), with her activism, feminism. All sacred life is regarded as sacred in her global and local engagements. Describing an historical account of the Women's Suffrage Movement in American in the 1800, she writes that Ida B. Wells was convening with Susan B. Anthony about promoting women's vote. Ida B. Wells, an African American, female, educated, activist, found herself in conflict with Anthony who was unwilling to allow black women and white southern women to come together on the ballot. She aligned herself with the politics of white Southern women who remained segregationist. Ida B. Wells voiced the opinion that black women wanted the bread before the ballot! The voting rights argument was growing louder and more urgent because black men and children were being lynched in southern states. Black women desired better educational opportunities. Susan B. Anthony and white southern educated women required better economic opportunities. Anthony met much resistance from Black mothers who would not join her women voters' right campaign. Anthony did not understand, writes Davis, why black women resisted her voting agenda. I submit that many years later Malcolm X delivered a sermon in Cleveland, Ohio at Corey United Methodist Church that heightened the stakes for voters rights using violence as a tactic to oppose voter discrimination and racism. He proclaimed that it would be the ballot, or the bullet, if whites were not willing to concede voting power to disenfranchised Blacks. In addition to Davis making ideas of racism, classism, and gender visible through the retelling of historical narratives, Davis made visible the racist ideals and politics of a cultural icon, namely Susan B. Anthony. Popular culture set Anthony as an authoritative leader in the fight for the rights of women. However, she fought only for educated white women who wanted

economic opportunities. She did not fight for the rights of black women and women of color. Ironically, Anthony is lauded in American history as a freedom fighter, whose face is minted on a U.S. coin, although she practiced racism against disenfranchised black people.

Davis writes about the intersectionality of power, media, and relationships between women of color and the dominant group. She writes about the rape of women in Nicaragua and sterilization abuse. She makes visible the ideas of racism and sexism concerning how soldiers were told to rape Vietnamese women as a tactic of war. There are policies she argues, that are put in place that sanctions the abuse of women. Davis makes visible that black males are reported in the media as perpetrators of rape, but she proves this narrative untrue by stating that statistically white men are the greatest perpetrators of rape. She points out that healthcare, contraceptives, and education remain unavailable for poor minority women. As a result, they slip through the cracks of poverty because they are having more children than they can afford. Right-to-lifers bomb abortion clinics, forcing sterilization abuse. She describes Black women being raped by members of the KKK as an intimidation tactic to scare black women from joining the anti-rape movement. Black women did not join this movement at the time of its inception because they feared that their brothers, sons, friends and husbands would be killed or jailed. Finally, Davis notes that there is the stereotype of the Black mother as a welfare queen that was promoted during the Reagan era. Davis describes how George Gilder a white scholar and author relentlessly reproduced the image of women like Anita Hill's sister and women who were on welfare as lazy and shiftless. These women in his opinion lived off the government and kept black males from working and allowing them to live rent free. Davis challenges many gender stereotypes and racist representations that the media set as fixed by pointing to George Gilder's logic as false, noting that more white women are on welfare than black women. Finally, she

notes that sexually assaulted women are looked at as the guilty party, the rapist as the victim.

Hannah Arendt understood the divisions of work as they related to the Greek polis. She wrote to inspire the common people to become involved in the political process. Arendt was a German-Jewish female who survived life in a concentration camp. In 1958, after her release, Arendt wrote *The Human Condition* because she understood the urgency of being involved in the political process. She wanted the traditional Western philosophical system to be demolished and recreated so would work for the human good and human goals. Arendt, like many of the authors above – Dubois, Davis, Gates, BoBo – understood the urgency of re-structuring existing relationships between dominate and subordinate groups. Like the scholars mentioned above, Arendt wrote to dismantle the current Greek hierarchical structure that reproduced the *vita contemplativa* and have the polis move to *vita activa*.<sup>323</sup> She blamed this earlier shift to philosophical thinking on the power of the media of that time, mainly Plato and social elites. They hoped to philosophically contemplate their way to an immortal, eternal life. Arendt believed in being active in the political process and in sharing ideas and opinions of the common people. Her tripartite method to replace the contemplative approach included 1. Labor 2. Work 3. Action. Arendt desired labor to produce the natural goods that were produce for the sustainability of biological lives.<sup>324</sup> Goods were necessary to address pure necessity. Work was the fabrication of reality; it would produce creative things like legal policies. Finally, she believed and advocated for common people to engage in the political process by exchanging ideas with each other, and sharing opinions, thus dismantling the ideas that philosophical contemplation would be the answer to the problems of injustice and the human conditions that people endured. Arendt argued for a more *vita activa*,

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<sup>323</sup> Hannah Arendt and Margaret Canovan, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7, 9.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 12.

and she claimed that just by being human, we all participated in the social life.<sup>325</sup> The demarcation of private and public life, for Arendt reproduced the existing relationships between dominant and subordinate groups in the Greek polis. Arendt challenged the way of contemplation as a means of resistance, or a means by which problems could be solved. She advocated for the common people to become a part of the political process.

### **Gender, Race, and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics**

Nikol Alexander-Floyd, of Rutgers University<sup>326</sup> writes about cultural nationalism being generally understood as “the view that African Americans possess a distinct aesthetic, sense of values, and communal ethos emerging from either, or both, their contemporary folkways and continental African heritage.”<sup>327</sup> Alexander-Floyd states that some scholars have made a distinction between cultural and political nationalisms, but most commentators would describe the phenomenon about which she writes as cultural nationalism. Alexander-Floyd critiqued a contemporary aspect of Black Nationalism focusing on race, gender, and class Alexander-Floyd’s research analyzes Black politics, providing a fresh perspective on Black Nationalism because it is holistic and aligns with the nature of my research concerning religious/spiritual practices of Black men. Alexander-Floyd’s work complements my research because it involves frameworks I can adopt to interrogate systems of oppression that undermine the wisdom of black women, who I contend undergird the spiritual/religious practices of Black men. Alexander-Floyd

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 22, 24.

<sup>326</sup> Nikol Alexander-Floyd is Associate Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies and an Associate Member of the Political Science Graduate Faculty at Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

<sup>327</sup> Nikol Alexander-Floyd, *Gender, Race, and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4.



interrogates society's masculinist emphasis which centers on wounded Black masculinity.<sup>328</sup> Her research spotlights the relentlessly reproduced caricatures of African-American males that are described in her book. Alexander-Floyd describes what is incorrectly identified as the reason for the breakdown of the black familial system; that has been caused by the plight of the endangered Black male, otherwise referred to as the Black male crisis. Alexander-Floyd's work echoes Angela Davis who reasons that under the gaze of white America, the structure of the black family will continue to be perceived as a broken and flawed unit because of its matriarchal focus.<sup>329</sup> Davis insists that this misinformation derives from the 1960's "Moynihan Report" study of the "Negro Family" system. The report correlates the so-called failures of the Black family and all of the socioeconomic struggles of Black families with the absence of the Black male head of household. Alexander-Floyd rejects this claim and notes its distortion resting on a patrosexist and archaic model of family.<sup>330</sup> As a side note, Delores S. Williams surmised in her article, "Surrogacy and Survival" that as black communities attempt to fit into white society, one of the assimilation methods has been to adopt the heteropatriarchal models of family systems in an effort to resemble white nuclear families.<sup>331</sup> Black families are viewed as lacking and being "culturally deviant" notes Alexander-Floyd<sup>332</sup> who then coined a name for the list of terms identifying the ways Black families were deviant. They became known as the Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm (BCPP), and that list<sup>333</sup> became the dominant ideology utilized by White

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>329</sup> Davis, *Women, Culture & Politics*, 12-13.

<sup>330</sup> Alexander-Floyd, *Gender, Race, and Nationalism*, 2.

<sup>331</sup> Karen Teel, *Racism and the Image of God*, Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 84.

<sup>332</sup> Alexander-Floyd, 3.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

Supremacists and Black Nationalists alike during the Civil Rights Movement and up to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>334</sup>

The BCPP has shaped popular culture, especially in terms of films, such as *Boyz-N-the Hood*, *Menace II Society*, and, more recently, *Baby Boy* and *Hustle and Flow*, all of which focus on various aspects of Black male endangerment.<sup>335</sup> The BCPP has also influenced popular music, particularly in the Hip Hop culture, with its projection of ghetto life as an authentic portrayal of Black culture.<sup>336</sup> Alexander-Floyd contends that for many the black academic, by definition, stands outside of the “authentic” black community because ‘authentic’ Black folk lack intellectual astuteness. The Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm says that characters in the above-named movies are authentic portrayals of blackness, and while these films focus on different aspects of black male endangerment, they still contribute to the negative narrative. Films like this validate the idea that white patriarchal hetero-sexual standards of family are the right way to be a family, which invalidates other forms of black family.

Indeed, although they framed the discussion differently than did the White conservatives, Black cultural nationalists such as Jawanza Kunjufu and Nathan and Julia Hare, as well as countless commentators and leaders, seemed to echo the same racist stereotypes about Blacks that many Whites did.<sup>337</sup> This disputation implies that blacks are responsible for their own socio-economic challenges such as poverty, a bootstrap mentality advocated by the Black religious educators just named.<sup>338</sup> Alexander-Floyd promotes the fallacy that the black female single parent is always the source of the problem, thus supporting conservative Whites who stress the

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>338</sup> Nathan Hare and Julia Hare, *The Miseducation of the Black Child – The Hare Plan: Educate Every Black Man, Woman and Child* (San Francisco, CA: Black Think Tank, 1991).

BCPP. Alexander Floyd's extensive research discusses the origination and the perpetuation of models of masculinity and femininity, especially as they relate to the endangered Black male and the "Black Welfare Queen." Alexander-Floyd analyzes and explains stories as a central means of understanding and reading social, political and cultural phenomena.<sup>339</sup> This work can be read alongside the narrative pedagogy work written by Frank Rodgers, *Finding God in Graffiti* (2011). Rodgers details ethnographic storytelling practices with African American youth as it relates to the history of oral traditions. Rodgers discusses how these traditions can facilitate social justice transformation in Black Christian communities.<sup>340</sup>

Alexander-Floyd notes that the narrative is not necessarily fixed, which prompts the awareness that the narratives found in Hip Hop culture are also up for interpretation. Alexander-Floyd correctly notes that the narrative of black pathology has been shaped by racial and gender politics and it guides many people's understanding of black family racism and black politics.<sup>341</sup> Alexander-Floyd challenges the Moynihan report, the Bush administration's fatherhood initiatives, and Reagan-Era policies which wrongly characterized the structure of the black family as pathological and argued that black families suffer because of their failed structure. This strategic tactic continues to be utilized to distract from the real and present issues facing black communities— racism, sexism, and classism which is perpetrated against the black community.<sup>342</sup> Alexander-Floyd explains that the BCPP paradigm is problematic because its framework not only pushes the narrative that the black family is on the decline, but it suggests it is declining because black people are involved in crime and drugs. The complaint which Alexander-Floyd

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<sup>339</sup> Alexander-Floyd, *Gender*, 50.

<sup>340</sup> Frank Rogers Jr., *Finding God in the Graffiti: Empowering Teenagers Through Stories* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2011). He is the Muriel Bernice Roberts Professor of Spiritual Formation and Narrative Pedagogy at the Claremont School of Theology.

<sup>341</sup> Alexander-Floyd, 12.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

makes complements Angela Davis' *Women, Race and Class* (1983) text as well, mainly because Davis disrupts conservative attempts to use the white patriarchal family structure to evaluate and construct a black family model.

Black children are being labeled mentally retarded, often by white female educators, at educational institutions attended by black children. These educators do not understand the environment in which these hypermasculine codes are developed.<sup>343</sup> Alexander-Floyd echoes this sentiment when she writes,

The CRP observes that “black children . . . are nearly three times more likely to be labeled mentally retarded and nearly twice as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed” than Whites, a gross overrepresentation that is due to racial discrimination.<sup>344</sup>

The bottom line is that the BCPP argues that blacks are inept because of social failings instead of racial and sexist policies that have been enacted historically and systemically.

Alexander-Floyd suggests that Black nationalism aligns Black male hood with White male hood. The model of White male hood, displays the White man as the primary breadwinner in the public realm, and he controls the household private sector as well. The woman is confined to the domestic realm and expected to be a homemaker.<sup>345</sup> However, Alexander-Floyd delves deeper into gender and racial politics by distinguishing the White female role from the Black female role in the public and private spheres.<sup>346</sup> She writes that historically the Black woman has filled domestic roles in other people's homes, like washwoman, maid, and nanny.<sup>347</sup> But the woman continued to be safeguarded within her own household. Alexander-Floyd reminds the

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<sup>343</sup> Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry, “Black Males,” 85–102.

<sup>344</sup> Alexander-Floyd, 47.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 27.

reader that unlike the White man, the Black man could not hold the title as breadwinner because of the lack of job opportunities, and unemployment rates.<sup>348</sup>

Alexander-Floyd echoes the sentiments of Black feminist scholar bell hooks when she observes, “Black men have not always adopted the standard of [White patriarchy, but historically they have] develop [ed] alternative definitions and expressions of manhood.”<sup>349</sup> Alexander-Floyd proposes that the “White patriarchal prerequisite to being male, is the key component to understanding the cultural production of the standard of maleness that is imagined and desired in the US and this defines the basis for nationalism in the United States.”<sup>350</sup> This belief is key element that must be understood as an underpinning for nationalism in the United States because it is the primary ideology which the Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm is established on, which it reinforces and continues to thrive on.

### **Hip Hop And Black Women**

A very different paradigm for young black males is found in the Hip Hop culture. Hip Hop is a tool used for spiritual resilience, but it should be coupled with other tools. Two of the most important are: A) Healthy and holistic communal teachings and religious education that is rooted in a divine character that is loving, kind, accepting, compassionate, merciful, forgiving to ALL humankind and that cares about ALL human needs, all plant and animal life and is entirely devoid of discriminatory actions and behaviors. B) Motherly/Sisterly wisdom and guidance that encompasses the care and love of the divine character described above. Motherly wisdom seeks to spread knowledge and growth that helps the person reach one’s full potential in God. This wisdom can be grounded in sacred texts that will guide the person’s spiritual journey and bring

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>350</sup> Alexander-Floyd, 31.

about liberation that is spiritual, physical, mental, social, and economic. Practical Theologian Evelyn Parker writes about emancipatory hope.<sup>351</sup> She defines it as type of Black freedom that allows women of African descent and mixed race women and girls to receive the freedom that comes with “forgiveness, femaleship, fortitude,”<sup>352</sup> and their individual needs met by a loving community. For Parker, the community she warns is the Christian community. Parker calls for a right-now type freedom, not an eschatological hope.

### **Functions of Black Bodies in Black Heteronormative Discourse**

The questions to be addressed in this section are: How does the sexualization of Black women's bodies inform Black heteronormative global discourse in Hip Hop culture? Do the narratives around Black women's bodies contribute to a culture of violence against Black women specifically, and subaltern women globally? The narratives surrounding Black women's bodies in Hip Hop have global and far-reaching implications for the cultures of violence and animus against women. How do narratives about Black women's bodies in Hip Hop culture negatively inform normative Black American masculinity? Does hetero-normative African American discourse frustrate Black men's ability to find and cultivate joy?

Any ethical reflection on Black male sexuality will call for Black males to be honest about the oppression that Black women have experienced at the hands of Black males. This is the argument made by African-American religious scholar and Dean of Howard University's School of Divinity Rev. Dr. Alton Pollard, III. Acknowledgement must also be made regarding violence

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<sup>351</sup> Evelyn L. Parker, *Between Sisters: Emancipatory Hope out of Tragic Relationships*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 128.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 128.

historically experienced by Black women at the hands of white males who held power over the Black enslaved population. Pollard argues that the lack of pedagogical responses from the Black community and congregational leadership are rooted in the silence in the Black church concerning sex and intimacy. The silence comes from the prevailing belief that sexuality or the erotic is bad, dirty, or negative; this pervasive thought makes breaching topics of Black sexuality in African American pulpits, Bible study, and small group settings very challenging.

I plan to conduct a research inquiry into how the Black Christian Church "has heavily relied on Aristotle's ethical philosophy to provide a conceptual basis for the articulation of its own ethical doctrines."<sup>1</sup> This will include Aristotle's idea of women existing as deformed men. Aristotelian philosophy is widespread in the Western European Christian Church. The church "has heavily relied on Aristotle's ethical philosophy to provide a conceptual basis for the articulation of its own ethical doctrines."<sup>353</sup>

I examine the history of what it means to be a "woman" and why the association with females dreaded is by men. Western European thought and Aristotelianism profoundly influenced Judeo- Christian philosophical and theological thought during the Middle Ages and continues to influence Christian theology, especially impacting the scholastic tradition of the church today.<sup>354</sup> This study will trace the origins of the thought of the body as a "prison house detention"<sup>355</sup> from which we need to escape and find refuge. Additionally, the study will argue that Black churches are still looking to archaic sources for religious education that are teaching

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<sup>353</sup> Charlie Ritch, "The Possibility of a Christian Appropriation of Aristotle's Ethical Philosophy," *Aporia*, 14, no. 1 (2004): 15, [http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/ritch-the\\_possibility\\_of\\_a\\_christian\\_appropriation\\_of\\_aristotles\\_ethical\\_philosophy.pdf](http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/ritch-the_possibility_of_a_christian_appropriation_of_aristotles_ethical_philosophy.pdf)

<sup>354</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, "Introduction." in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight Hopkins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

messages of distrust of the body. This message is harming the Black community instead of healing it.

This investigation is based on the belief that Black male spirituality and sexuality are interconnected. Black religious life – namely the church – has always been foundational in defining spiritually correct understandings of the body and sexuality.<sup>356</sup> The church which has been influenced by Aristotle and Western European thought, which also influences the characterization of the historical and present role of the “woman.” Consequently, it is in this representation of the subjugated woman that the archetype of the hyper-masculinity of Black men emerged.

Let us now survey how the woman has been written about by Aristotle and dehumanized by his philosophy. Aristotle brought into Greek society his philosophy of women being subordinate to men. Afterwards, his philosophies were adopted into mainstream society by Western Europeans and by Christianity. Western European missionaries were dominant in the African slave trade, and the Black Church was birthed out of slavery. Therefore, a teaching that stated that women are inferior beings is not foreign to Black Church pedagogy.

During the 1900s, it was standard for some whites to develop academic text and literary theories<sup>357</sup> in early institutions which pathologized blackness as it relates to sexuality. The stereotyping of black bodies and black sexuality as dirty, damaging and “both ill and infectious” has been documented extensively<sup>358</sup> For example, in the early 1900s, Arrah B. Evarts compiled a case study of a patient at Saint Elizabeth’s, a psychiatric institution in Washington D.C. The

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<sup>356</sup> Alton B. Pollard III, “Teaching the Body: Sexuality and the Black Church” in *Loving the Body*: ed. by Anthony Pinn and Dwight Hopkins), 316.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>358</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 131.



author of *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* Sander Gilman notes that Evarts' records contains "culturally endangered stereotypes" about her black patients because "For her, blackness signified pederasty: To her the whole African or black race was originally conceived by pederasty, and is so perpetuated."<sup>359</sup> Why was this researcher, assigned to assist people living and suffering with mental illness, allowed to harbor and publish such deeply problematic and racially motivated ideas in her work that stigmatize entire groups of people? Evarts maintains, "...the archaic roots are quite faithfully adhered to, and do not need more than a recapitulation; black, the color of evil..."<sup>360</sup> Gilman suggests that for Evarts, "blackness" and "illness" are closely related and he illustrates that her sexual deviation as it was understood by medicine and society in 1919 reifies assumptions and stereotypes previously held about black people in the early twentieth century.<sup>361</sup> The answer to my question above is: maybe Evarts was not the only person or institution to hold these racially motivated biases. Possibly, these findings were considered correct, and those who diagnosed and published findings, were not considered to be involved in biased efforts to pathologize black bodies.

Gilman continues to provide textual representations of black men and women who have been labeled racially as Other.<sup>362</sup> He analyzes medical and historical documents which have been studied and reified for decades about blackness, ideas which I argue continue to dwell in both white and Black psyches. These documents and records which Gilman describes have contributed to the hyper-pathologization of black bodies. In addition to years of trans-Atlantic slavery trauma, and Aristotelian philosophy which was blindly accepted by Black churches and the Black community in general, old medical ignorance had made a huge contribution to

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid..

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 130.

society's labeling of blackness as pathologically different.<sup>363</sup>

Gilman refers to European art from the 18th and 19th centuries, that depicts degrading images of black bodies. Like Gilman before her, in *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison examines American European literary works that perpetuate stereotypes about black bodies invoking madness in white imagination,<sup>364</sup> black bodies being considered sexually deviant in white imagination, and how traditional readings of European American novels, like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*<sup>365</sup>, encompassing tropes and images that are racially motivated. However, in Twain's famous book these stereotypes are disguised by the writer using comedic relief, exaggerated storytelling tactics, and a point of view of a child who is supposedly marginalized and untouched by class and status biases.<sup>366</sup> Gilman writes, "[Hugo von] Hofmannsthal was also aware that one of the central functions of the black servant in the visual arts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was as a maker of sexualization of the society in which he or she was found."<sup>367</sup> Gilman writes that the operas by Igor Stravinsky, *A Rake's Progress* (1733-34) and by William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress* (1731), present detailed characteristics of two black servants that represent illicit sexual activity.<sup>368</sup> Gilman writes,

The association of the black with concupiscence reaches back into the Middle Ages. The twelfth-century Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela wrote, "at Seba on the river Pishon...is a people ...who like animals, eat of the herbs that grow on the banks of the Nile and in the fields. They go about naked and have not the intelligence of ordinary men. They cohabit with their sisters and anyone they can find...And these are the Black slaves, the sons of Ham. The black, both male and female, becomes by the eighteenth century an icon for sexuality in general, almost always, however, paired with a white figure of the

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>364</sup> Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, vi-viii.

<sup>365</sup> Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, was published in the UK in 1884 and in the United States in 1884.

<sup>366</sup> Morrison, 53-55.

<sup>367</sup> Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 79.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

opposite sex.<sup>369</sup>

Gilman also point out that the labeling of the black female as sexually more primitive, and therefore more sexually intensive, by writers like Abbe Raynal (1775) would have been dismissed as unscientific by radical empiricists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe.<sup>370</sup> These radical empiricist demanded very specific evidence to prove that blacks were different and deviant from whites.<sup>371</sup> White empiricists required case studies, including physical proof, that placed blacks in a position antithetical to those of whites. European academics went as far as requiring parts of black women's genitalia to be juxtaposed alongside white women's genitalia. Gilman writes that this was done by people like J.J. Virey, a race historian, who seemed obsessed with proving that the genitalia of black women differed significantly from those of white women, used his findings as scientific evidence for racialized pathology.<sup>372</sup> Unfortunately, his findings are documented in the *Dictionary of Medical Sciences* (1819)<sup>373</sup> and cited by numerous researchers who validate the racial discrimination performed against black bodies based on differences in sexual anatomy.<sup>374</sup> Gilman reports that Virey summarized his and many of his contemporaries' views regarding the sexual nature of black females in terms of accepted medical discourse. Virey writes their "voluptuousness" is "developed to a degree of lascivity unknown in our climate, for their sexual organs are much more developed than those of whites."<sup>375</sup> Virey calls the black woman's form "hideous" and her

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 79-81.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

nose “horribly flattened”<sup>376</sup>

Gilman reports the pathological verbiage used by another European elite which was widely accepted by others in European society.

The black female looks different. Her physiognomy, her skin color, the form of her genitalia marked her as inherently different. The nineteenth century perceived the black female as possessing not only “primitive” sexual appetite, but also the external signs of temperament “primitive” genitalia.<sup>377</sup>

Gilman exposes how black bodies were treated in the textual representations in areas of science, art, and literature by European authorities. Black bodies were documented by whites for centuries, as evoking feelings of disgust and associating the bodies with madness, and sexual deviance. I argue that this pathology is still relevant today because it has left its remnants and the practices that resulted from the publication of these documents and similar helped to justify death-dealing institutions like the trans-Atlantic slave trade which brutalized people of African descent. Finally, the pathologization of black bodies continues today through educational and governmental systems.

Warped understandings of male and female roles continue to influence access to leadership roles in the Black church. This misunderstanding of gender roles, as stated above, is deeply rooted in Aristotelian thought which is interwoven with Christian doctrine. Aristotle’s philosophy became coupled with the Black male need to regain authority and power involved with being the head of a Black family which they felt was lost during slavery. This hierarchical structure was easily transferred to intimate relationships. As presented in the media and society, the archetype of the hyper-masculine Black male figure is constantly fed as the only option available for being Black and male in intimate partnerships. The more ‘masculine’ characteristics

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 85.

of aggression and physical strength-desired over more ‘feminine’ characteristics of emotionality and sensitivity. So even though there is a huge absence of the Black male presence in the general Black community, the few households that have a Black male presence are limited by the lack of socially acceptable ways of being Black and male in relationships other than the hierarchical, patriarchal, racialized heteronormative model. Additionally, this model is sexually limited as well because it does not allow space for Black males who are sexually involved with other males.

### Definition of Terms

**1. Black sexuality** - Pollard defines Black sexuality as the basic dimension of our self--understanding and way of being in the world as Black male and female persons from sex role understandings to affectional orientation, genital activity, and physiological arousal, the capacity for sensuousness and more.

**2. Black Masculinity** - bell hooks defines Black Masculinity<sup>378</sup> this way: “The whole construction of Black masculinity [possession of the qualities traditionally associated with men from the African diaspora] as we know it is so mired in patriarchal thinking. Within a white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy that Black men can't begin to liberate themselves without interrogating and questioning how sexism has shaped the nature of Black masculinity.”

She continues: <sup>379</sup> “They wanted Black women to conform to the gender norms set by white society. They wanted to be recognized as ‘men,’ as patriarchs, by other men, including white men. Yet they could not assume this position if Black women were not willing to conform to prevailing sexist gender norms. Many Black women who have endured white -supremacist patriarchal domination during slavery did not want to be dominated by Black men after manumission.”

Tim Cresswell writes of Black Masculinity: ‘Black male entertainers and sportsmen in particular have been labeled as hypermasculine, excessively sexual, and “naturally” athletic. Sometimes these images reflect a degree of admiration (particularly in sports) but more often

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<sup>378</sup> bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (NY, New York: Routledge, 2004), 6.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 7

they undergird a sense of prevailing fear among white onlookers.<sup>380</sup>

**3. Black Spirituality** - Pollard defines Black spirituality as at once personal, familial, cultural, and communal. It is the response of the African- descended children, women and men to the Sacred Presence who lives and loves within us, who calls us by name, and who compels us to liberating and holistic relationships with one another, with all the earth and more. Black spirituality is at once excises the sickness and sin of racism and sexism, heterosexism and homophobia, mitigating factors all in the Black quest for mutuality and wholeness.

**4. The Black Church** - Pollard defines the Black Church as a network of communities of faith in the United States, worship, and life born out of and informed by the historic experiences of people of African descent in this land. It has incorporated a host of sexual understandings – for good and ill – into its language and images, singing and preaching, worship and leadership patterns, into its assumptions about power and morality, and even in its definitions of membership.

**Errol Lamont Fields defines the Black Church** as described here as referring to the seven Black protestant denominations arising post-slavery as defined by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya.<sup>381</sup> These are: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, National Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Church of God in Christ, referring to them as those “independent historic and totally Black controlled denominations”<sup>382</sup>

### **Silence is Not Golden: African American Church View on Sexuality**

African American congregational leadership is at the root of the silence around sex and intimacy that is prevalent in the Black church. Because of the dominate belief that sexuality or the erotic, outside of heterosexual marriage is bad, dirty, or negative, the thought that there should exist only one acceptable archetype of sexuality permeates the atmosphere of Black churches. For example, many Black gay men interviewed by Errol Lamont Fields for his doctoral research were very close to their family members, and were themselves enmeshed with the Black

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<sup>380</sup> Tom Cresswell, “Black Moves: Moments in the History of African-American Masculine Mobilities.” *Transfers* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.3167/TRANS.2016.060103>.

<sup>381</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

<sup>382</sup> Errol Lamont Fields, “Racial Identity, Masculinity and Homosexuality in the Lives of Young Black Men Who Have Sex With Men: Implications For HIV Risk” (dissertation, John Hopkins University, 2009), 157.

Church institution as clergy or lay (non-clergy) leaders. Additionally, the Black male interviewees repeatedly used the phrase “grew up in the Church” to describe their level of involvement and how they and their family members were inextricably connected to Black Church culture, Black religiosity and a church-based community.<sup>383</sup> Henceforth, the attitudes about sexuality or the erotic being bad or dirty, and more specifically, the disdain for homosexuality and homosexual partnerships from Black Church authorities were known. Fields interviews a Black male church attendee disguised as “Samuel,” who explains :

The Church is a big factor in your life, especially if you’re born and raised in the Church...I went to church from Sunday through Sunday! Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, I was in church! –“Samuel”<sup>384</sup>

Fields continues to document the narrative of a Black male whose family members were church leaders. He describes how Black Church and Black religion heavily impacted him and his family. He notes, My father’s a minister, a Baptist minister, has been since I was about 17. So I grew up in the Church – “Jordan”<sup>385</sup>

Additionally, one young Black male converse about his grandmother being “one of the ladies of the church.” He remembers his grandmother being an active participant in “just about everything,” and he recalls how his family would “run” everything.<sup>386</sup>

One interviewee described the importance of his family’s deep connection to the church this way, he notes,

These are the people that ...watched me, and to some extent, cared for me, so I would say [church] is very important. [Church is] very important to me and what [church members] think of me is important as well. ..I will modify just to keep what I have ‘cause you know, if I was to like just get rid of everybody and disown, you know, whoever knows

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

me, whoever are my family, my friends and everything, where does that leave me? Utterly alone, except for other people which, you know, really don't mean anything to me because I don't really know you so how important could you possibly be when compared to somebody who grew up with me? They have meaning, these people have meaning to me, so, you know I try not to jeopardize that – "Eric"<sup>387</sup>

Another interviewee conversed with Fields about his previous self-hatred, which existed as a direct result of the sexual ethic upheld by the Black Church he is affiliated with. He responds, "I felt like such a hypocrite because every time I went to church, I felt really bad, I felt really bad about myself. I didn't like myself at all, you know – "Christopher"<sup>388</sup>

In comparison, the Black men that Fields interviewed who were loosely affiliated, or not affiliated at all with a Black Church, were not as affected by the rigid and conservative sexual ethic of the Black Church. They created their own reality, and embraced their truth in efforts not to allow rigid and theologically harmful Black Church authorities to oppress them. Fields reports that "Adam" believes,

I am so defiant when it comes to Black religious church. I am. I have to admit it. When they start talking about God had made Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve and just blah, blah, blah, and I just don't want to listen to that and I really truly believe that if God really wanted it that much, we would not be here and I truly do believe that God wants us to be happy, as long as we serve him in every shape and form. We are to live life and to experience. And I do believe that is why we are here. And we are here as a matter of free will.<sup>389</sup>

Black church authorities have much impact on how people think about sex, sexual intimacy, and relationships, even to the detriment of Black congregants internalizing self-hatred out of fear of rejection. These narratives are included to substantiate my claim of the power invested in Black church authorities.

Since one archetype of sexuality is assumed to be the norm, a specific reading of the

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid, 158-159.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.



biblical text is promoted. This approach to the sacred text continues to influence a formative and foundational understanding of the way Black Christians understand sexuality and the body.

### **How Does this Happen?**

Early philosophical works influenced the Age of Enlightenment, and a large number of Christians were impacted by aspects of the Enlightenment.<sup>390</sup> From that time, philosophical ideas like Aristotle's teachings around the body have been a source of shame and distrust which has influenced Protestant worship vocabulary.<sup>391</sup> This Protestant worship language often disparages the human form, specifically the female body, in the name of Christianity and Puritanism.<sup>392</sup>

Two categories of Protestant worship vocabulary influence African American Christian worship will be investigated here. The most important of the two is the sacred narrative in Genesis chapter 3. This will be my primary focus because Black religious educators have interpreted the narrative of the Fall and Eve's role in Genesis chapter 3 by applying a literal lens to investigate it, and its patriarchal and sexist language that disenfranchises women. The secondary category of Protestant worship vocabulary that influences African American worship

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<sup>390</sup> Alan Charles Kors, "The Philosophy of the Enlightenment," November 18, 2011, <http://atlassociety.org/commentary/commentary-blog/4876-the-philosophy-of-the-enlightenment>.

<sup>391</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 261. Cahill sites Michel Foucault's work *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* which focuses on sexuality in the medieval period as a means of self-affirmation of the bourgeois, power, and control. He writes, "We are often reminded of the countless procedures which Christianity once employed to make us detest the body, but let us ponder all the ruses that were employed for centuries to make us love sex, to make the knowledge of it desirable, and everything said about it precious..."

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 3; 5. Cahill draws from a Christian feminist ethical framework as she argue that as opposed to isolating and condemning women, it is possible to establish just conditions utilizing moral values for men and women by critiquing Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical tradition. Cahill contends that many Christians traditionally default to the biblical tradition, natural and moral law for definitive answers concerning human behavior. Although Scripture has been important in Protestant theology, Cahill discusses a modern positive view of sexual ethics. She applies a more balanced and healthier "corrective to Aristotelian, Stoic, and gnostic, elements which denigrated the body, condemned sexual desire, urged sexual abstinence, and tolerated sexual activity only in view of procreative intentions." Cahill quotes thinkers like John Boswell whose work questions if heteronormative discourse has historically held the status of normalcy that anti-homosexual promoters claim that it has. Additional Cahill employs the research of Mary Daly, a post-Christian feminist who disregards

is the ritualistic liturgy which is recited during Holy Communion entitled the Collect. The Collect is problematic because the theology behind the liturgy is archaic.

An initial critique of the Eve narrative is that there are two Creation stories in the book of Genesis in the Old Testament. Therefore, the reader must ask herself why our society places such a heavy emphasis on *this* Creation narrative usurping others, placing the responsibility for the “sin” of all of humanity upon a female? Why is Genesis 3 *the* most trustworthy narrative for religious educators?<sup>393</sup> The first female character to walk the earth is named Eve. She is given this name Eve after her reported transgression, Adam named her “Eve because she was the mother of all living” (3:16, 20)<sup>394</sup> The name Eve describes her function and destiny in spiritual history because she is reported to have birthed humanity. Eve means “life” or “life-giving,” or “mother of all who have life,” and her life is in us all.<sup>395</sup> Eve is introduced in the book of Genesis, not only as the mother of all life, but simultaneously with the irrevocable label of the temptress or the sinful woman. When the creation narrative located in Genesis 3 is encountered, readers inherit this unshakable and obstinate idea subscribed to Eve’s character as temptress and sinful first woman. As a result of the immovable characterization assigned to Eve, women in our society have ardently attempted to strategize ways not to be aligned with this biblical character in their efforts not to shoulder the burden of guilt for Eve’s reported sin and shamefulness that tarry

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<sup>393</sup> David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 7-8. Cotter answers the questions that many students of the Biblical text raise once they discover there is more than one Creation narrative. Which narrative is to be trusted? In the case of my argument, Cotter provides understanding for why the most commonly chosen Creation narrative, in which Eve is used as a scapegoat for an otherwise free will agent, is often chosen. I particularly resonate with Cotter’s perspective because he notes the politics of storytelling which biblical authors used in efforts to create interest, engage readers, and finally captivate the audience. This logic makes sense when we consider factors such as who is writing the narrative, and their purpose for writing. Additionally, Cotter writes that the creation of an opposing god, in this case the serpent, by the author is necessary for chaos to occur. Lastly, Cotter clarifies the importance of the serpent’s placement in the Fall narrative: a) the serpent’s presence helps to further the writer’s purpose of how the Fall happened; b.) the serpent’s location serves to create tension between humanity and God; therefore, placing Eve as the problem according to this interpretation.

<sup>394</sup> BibleGateway, “All the Women of the Bible – Eve,” website, *All the Women of the Bible*, (1988), Chapter 2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Eve>.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

with womanhood, but women's efforts have been to no avail. Eve is known for disobeying God, by allowing Satan, embodied in the evil serpent, to deceive her into believing that she would be like God if she ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve tempts her husband Adam to partake of the forbidden fruit. Eve is known not only as the first woman, but as the first female human who mustered the audacity to incite insubordination against God via the wiles of the Serpent. It will, now and forever, will be etched on the hearts of many who stumble upon her story that it is because of Eve's sin that humanity fell. Whenever Eve's name is uttered, be it from the mouth of the Black preacher, behind the sacred desk, or from the shouts of the Black praise team in the choir stand, because of the weightiness of her femaleness in conjunction with her audacity to attempt to usurp God's Holy authority, it will be told that her wicked deeds were the cause of the fall of humanity, before the watchful eyes of God. Eve will always be viewed, by some, as the mother of spiritual history, and by others as the source of original sin.

The biblical narrative is a powerful symbol of how some tenets of Christian worship shame the body of Christ, most precisely shaming Black female worshippers. The characterization of Eve as the first woman temptress translates in many Black Church worship settings as meaning all women who should cover themselves and adhere to strict holiness codes because their male counterparts are very weak spiritually and easily seduced by temptation. Women in this setting are said to be easily utilized by Satan to tempt men sexually. Although Adam had himself the free-will to disagree with Eve and reject her temptation, Eve carries the burden of blame for accepting the advances of Satan's suggestions. Parallel to Eve stands the Black woman, who makes up the majority of the Black church population<sup>396</sup> clutching her Bible and faithfully witnessing to what she has read.

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<sup>396</sup> this was footnote 23 -- it had no text to place here

The Genesis Eve narrative contributes to the theology of “blaming”<sup>397</sup> which happens in the Black Church culture, where body shaming is pervasive and women are blamed for their bodies. Body shaming, put simply, is the constant living in fear, guilt and shame for no other reason than being female.

A healthy re-interpretation of the Eve narrative would make being female-bodied less uncomfortable and restrictive in the majority Black church worship spaces. The healthy re-interpretation of the Eve narrative would help to confront the ways in which the comfort and spiritual health of Black men, is privileged over that of Black women. For example, a healthy reinterpretation of the Eve narrative might prompt readers to consider why the writer decides to place Eve, the woman, in the position of being tempted by Satan and therefore making the female embody the very idea of temptation. A more balanced approach would allow us to consider why Adam was not approached by the crafty Serpent and tempted to eat of the fruit. Also, why is Adam freed from the responsibility of receiving the fruit, since he, too, is a free-will agent? Adam was present when God commanded them “you must not eat.”<sup>398</sup> Regardless of the reasoning behind the writer of Genesis allowing temptation to be embodied in a female, students of the biblical text should follow in the footsteps of Catholic monk, Kilian McDonnell, who creates an alternative, praising Eve for her courage to not blindly follow the word of God.<sup>399</sup> McDonnell praises Eve for her curiosity and credits Eve for the origins of the concept of hermeneutics because of her curiosity.<sup>400</sup>

In her work *Righteous Discontent* Evelyn Higginbotham writes about the culture of the

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<sup>397</sup> This was footnote 24 -- it also had no text to place here

<sup>398</sup> Kenneth L. Barker and Donald W. Burdick, eds., *Zondervan NIV Study Bible: New International Version*, Fully rev (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>399</sup> Kilian McDonnell, *Yahweh's Other Shoe* (Collegeville, Minn: Saint John's University Press, 2006), 4–5.

<sup>400</sup> Nazia, Islam, Eve and the Hermeneutical Task, October 26, 2015, Email correspondence.

Black church as it relates to Black males being given priority and Black women being treated “as less than” and subordinate. She writes:

[Black] male-based traditions and rules of decorum sought to mute women’s voices and accentuate their subordinate status vis-a-vis men. Thus tainted by the values of the larger American society, the Black church sought to provide men with full manhood rights, while offering women a separate and unequal status.<sup>401</sup>

An example of Black women congregants being treated as less worthy than Black men congregants in worship spaces, can be seen in the rule that Black women are forced to cover themselves because Black male pastors and other Black male congregants claim that women are a source of sexual temptation during the Black worship experience. A healthy re-interpretation of the Eve narrative will open dialogue concerning Black women experiencing Black church worship in restrictive ways. In small groups, Black male congregants can actually practice active listening, as they experience the Eve narrative told, in conjunction with women’s testimonies, and how the patriarchal implications of the narrative spiritually imprison women congregants. Black women can discuss experiencing Black church worship as a non-liberating spiritual space, and how Black women’s bodies become a panoptic prison, where everything about their bodies is up to be viewed and critiqued by systems. Michele Foucault has written about the gradual switch from corporal punishment in penal systems to torture of the human soul. This correlates with my argument because Black women’s bodies are being observed and policed in the structure of the Black church so much so that they feel the need to police each other’s dress code to the detriment of their spiritual health. There is no longer need for a patriarchal religious authority to police Black women’s bodies because Black women are prone to policing themselves and each other. There is no longer corporal punishment in the Black church worship, but torture of the Black

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<sup>401</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3

female soul.<sup>402</sup> This discussion should include naming the tendency for Black women to self-regulate their bodies during worship, where exposure of flesh is argued to be sinful. This tendency is exacerbated by not only outward authorities (bishops, pastors) but is simultaneously enforced through their own lens of modesty and self-correction. In her article, “Sanctified Rage: Practicing Holy Indignation with Teenagers in the Black Church,”<sup>403</sup> Evelyn L. Parker writes about the heavy emphasis placed upon female dress codes in Black churches – a social issue she frames as a theological dilemma:

Since enslaved Africans in North America established Black religious institutions, they have been cultural centers of meaning, value and authority that have sustained the Black community. Members of the community revered Black religious institutions, including Black Christian churches, so much that a set of codes and rituals were developed to maintain a high level of respect for the Black church. This emphasis on respect has complexified the church’s relationship with anger and its expressions. . . . Dress codes specifically for women, have traditionally included dresses with hemlines at or below the knee, dresses with sleeves (preferably three-quarter length), and a prohibition of “erotic” colored dresses (red dresses).<sup>404</sup>

The excerpt above, drawn from Parker’s research, signifies that Black religious authorities place the burden of dressing respectably literally on the backs of Black women and young girls.<sup>405</sup> Parker describes how the COCIC dress code policy originates from a social phobia concerning Black women traveling safely and avoiding racially motivated assault. In the COGIC churches, like many other Black churches, a social issue was framed as a theological dilemma.

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<sup>402</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 14. The panopticon prison is a model in which a single guard is in the center of a prison in efforts for inmates to believe they are all being watched. Even though it is humanly impossible for one guard to observe a crowd of inmates, even with the guard in the center, nevertheless, this structure provides uncertainty to inmates because they are unsure whether they are being watched and it provides security for the guards. Ultimately, this means that all inmates must act as though they are being watched at all times. Henceforth guards effectively control inmate’s behavior constantly because inmates police themselves.

<sup>403</sup> Evelyn L. Parker, “Sanctified Rage: Practicing Indignation with Teenagers in the Black Church,” in *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World* Almeda M. Wright and Mary Elizabeth Moore, eds. (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2008), 202–204.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

Finally, the policing of Black women's bodies in the majority of Black church worship settings contains a certain pedagogical tone. The implicit curriculum<sup>406</sup> is that Black women's bodies are relegated only to their flesh, to their genitalia, and to childbirth. Furthermore, pedagogically it implies that Black female bodies are purely an object of human desire, and her companionship, friendship, and personhood is not considered.

Another tenet of Protestant Christian worship that has the power to shame the body of Christ can be found in archaic and spiritually harmful liturgical words included in the Collect.<sup>407</sup> The Collect is recited immediately before Holy Communion is administered during worship, in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) tradition.<sup>408</sup> Once a month, an ordained minister recites the Collect<sup>409</sup> listeners sit silently:<sup>410</sup>

We do not presume to come to this Thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table. But Thou are the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy; Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink His blood, that our sinful souls and bodies may be made clean by His death and washed through His most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in Him and he in us. Amen.<sup>411</sup>

The values that are being uplifted in this liturgical passage are outdated and insensitive to

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<sup>406</sup> Bracke and Tye, *Teaching the Bible*, 56-59.

<sup>407</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 1st ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 52. *Westminster Dictionary* defines the Collect as a short set of prayer for particular occasions in public worship. In the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church the pastor(s) in charge lead the congregation in reciting the Collect. The Collect is recited immediately before Holy Communion also known as the Lord's Supper. In the CME Church tradition the ordained Elder recites the Collect immediately before the administering of the Lord's Supper.

<sup>408</sup> Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 23-24. The history of this historically Black church denomination is extensively documented by Bishop Othal Lakey. The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was founded by forty-one ex-slaves named the "tender plant of God" because of the delicacy of their church planting mission and the sufferings that they endured.

<sup>409</sup> Bishop Marshall Gilmore, *Book of Ritual (New and Revised) Christian Methodist Episcopal Church* (Memphis, TN: The Department of Publications Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, 1995), 21.

<sup>410</sup> Maxine McClury, "Approaching the Lord's Table: The Preparation for and Receiving of the Holy Communion - What Worshipers Should Responsibly Know, Understand, and Embrace," ed. Clifford, L. Harris, August 2007, 3, [http://www.thecmechurch.org/connectionaldepartments/layministry/The\\_Lords\\_Table.pdf](http://www.thecmechurch.org/connectionaldepartments/layministry/The_Lords_Table.pdf) Holy Communion also known as The Lord's Supper occurs once a month in most CME Churches around the world.

<sup>411</sup> Gilmore, 21.

the spiritual needs of women, the differently abled, and other congregants with various bodily discomforts. This theology is not contextual and it is irrelevant to particular situations of postmodern studies of the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality. Not only is the Collect irrelevant in that it leaves behind cultural and theological changes such as bringing Christological concepts of grace and mercy to this generation, but the theology behind the Collect is damaging and harmful as it demands congregants dwell on their sins daily; such rumination results in compulsively obsessing on the state of their “wicked” and “sinful souls and bodies” as they are reminded of how damaged their relationships with God are – instead of focusing on the liberating redemption found in Christ. These words have the power and ability to shame the entire body of Christ in general as the language behind the theology is archaic in its discussion of how inevitably sinful we are.

More specifically, this worship liturgy contributes to the perpetual dark stain which Black women are constantly reminded of because of a narrative rehearsed in church worship about the fallen state of our bodies. Additionally, the Collect compounds the anguish of Black women's entrapment, captivity, and bodily imprisonment because of a dreaded physical bodily existence. The theology behind the liturgical language complicates the ways in which we think about bodily ailments such as disabilities, infertility, sickness, and birth defects being punishments from God because of sin. As opposed to Black males, Black women are predisposed to personalize and internalize the Collect's outdated theology about the body since women suffer much more from demarcated gender lines in society via sexism and patriarchy. Black women constantly listen to the “manifold sins and wickedness” in their spiritual renewal enclaves and this impacts their spiritual, mental, and emotional health. As a result of archaic liturgical theological language, Black women bear physical, mental, emotional shame because of the constant reminder during



congregational worship of their unworthiness.

Tenets about Black women's bodies are refracted within Hip Hop. For example the narrative concerning Black female sexual objectification is still present in Hip Hop music and Hip Hop culture; however, its presentation is in reverse order. I am arguing that there is a refractory period where Hip Hop changed the direction of how Black women's bodies are being treated, viewed and shamed. However the Black church worship experience still has the ability to shame Black women's bodies. I have argued that the two tenets of Black church worship described above shame the Black female body. First, the patriarchal interpretation of sacred texts such as the Eve narrative, which is utilized by some to require Black women to cover themselves, causes them to feel shame about their physical bodies. Also, forcing Black female church attendees to police themselves and each other concerning their dress codes, causes spiritual and emotional discomfort and decay. Additionally, there is archaic worship liturgy that should be revised which tends to shame Black women specifically, and the body of Christ in general. Additionally, archaic liturgy such as the Collect can contribute to the denial of the intrinsic value of the Black physical body as important part of divine creation.<sup>412</sup>

In opposition, Hip Hop culture and music takes a different direction than the restrictive view of Black female sexuality that Black religious practitioners take. On one end of the spectrum, Hip Hop requires Black women to be sexual objects exposing their physical bodies and placing them as the center of attraction. Black women become disposable commodities sold to the highest bidder. Whereas patriarchal interpretation of the Eve narrative by churches requires Black women to feel ashamed of being sexual beings by imposing seductive tendencies on Black women in Black worship spaces, Hip Hop flips the switch on the Eve narrative to make

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<sup>412</sup> Joshua Mendez, Conversation about the Worth of Human Bodies at Claremont School of Theology, October 17, 2015.

Black women's bodies as disposable (i.e. baby momma, whore, bitch, nappy headed ho).

Followers of this school of thought entertain the notion that sensuality, especially outside the realm of hetero-normativity, is dirty or negative. This line of thinking, which has been largely handed down to the Black community, has infiltrated the world of Black Churches and Black Spirituality. Given the interconnectedness of those two realms with everyday Black-American life, it has become widely accepted by the Black population that any discussion on the topic of sex and the body is taboo. This restriction leaves little room for discourse in most areas of life, causing the discussion to seek asylum that is often available only in Hip Hop culture. Scholar and activist Angela Davis, author of *Women, Race, and Class* argues that one of the many plights of Black women during American chattel slavery was the continuous and ruthless rape Black women endured at the hands of their white slave masters. Black women were then force-fed a nineteenth century narrative of what womanhood should embody, which included the importance of being a nurturer, attitudes of femininity, and homemaking ideals.<sup>413</sup> Davis writes:

the slave woman was first a full-time worker for her owner, and only incidentally a wife, mother and homemaker.”...nineteenth century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women’s roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husband, Black woman were practically anomalies. Though Black women enjoyed few of the dubious benefits of the ideology of womanhood, it is sometimes assumed that the typical female slave was a house servant – either a cook, maid, or mammy for the children in the “big house.” Uncle Tom and Sambo have always found a faithful companion in Aunt Jemima and the Black Mammy – stereotypes which presume to capture the essence of the Black woman’s role during slavery. ..[Black women] were victims of sexual abuse and barbarous mistreatment that only could be inflicted on women. ...Black women came to be increasingly appraised for their fertility (or for lack of it): she who was potentially the mother of ten, twelve, fourteen or more became a coveted treasure...in the eyes of slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of slave labor force. They were “breeder” animals...slave women were classified as “breeders” as opposed to “mothers”; their infant children could be sold away from them like calves from cows. As females, slave women were inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion...Rape... was an uncannily expressed expression of the slaveholder’s economic mastery..over Black women as

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<sup>413</sup> Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 5.

workers.<sup>414</sup>

The Christian scriptures were used by white slave masters to support the lethal trauma of slavery. But in efforts for Black women to prevent their children from being born into the gruesome life of slavery described above, they resisted by having abortions. As if Black males were not pitted strongly enough against Black women during slavery, in 1939, Davis documents how white birth control supporters recruited Black Baptist male ministers to preach and teach Black congregants to control the Black population through birth control methods. Christian pulpits were used as a manipulation strategy to spread birth control propaganda. The Birth Control Federation of America, planned a “Negro Project,” The Federation wrote,

we want to exterminate the Negro population and the minister is the man who can straighten out that idea if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members.<sup>415</sup>

This is one specific instance where Protestant Christianity influenced Black Christian worship practice to compromise Black womanhood: Black women who endured the hardships of slavery through sexual brutality by white male slave masters, then were religiously manipulated and controlled by Black male religious authority figures who had the power to influence Black Christian Protestant worship spaces.

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid, 5, 7.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 214-215.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE WISDOM OF BLACK WOMEN HIP HOP ARTISTS<sup>416</sup>

Janelle Monae, affectionately known as The “Electric Lady,” is a good example of someone who has become a successful Black female artist while defying the normal stereotypical gender performance images that many female Hip Hop artists conform to in efforts to gain success. Expressing her femininity in a way that encompasses diverse clothing styles and not complying with Eurocentric standards of beauty, she has shown that she can be successful and be signed by record companies without compromising her values.

As stated above, historically Hip Hop music and the Hip Hop movement was birthed out of the African American prophetic tradition. African Americans and their collaborators, Hispanic Americans, have embraced this prophetic tradition by writing and performing music, and creating beats that combat socio-economic oppression. Dr. Tricia Rose, author of *Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, pinpoints Lady B as the first recorded Black woman rapper in 1978.<sup>417</sup> Henceforth, Black female Hip Hoppers like Janelle Monae, Erykah Badu, Queen Latifah, M.C. Lyte, Lauryn Hill, Salt and Pepper, continue in this prophetic tradition via their diverse careers in music, film, and radio broadcasting. These women continue Hip Hop’s prophetic tradition as they speak against sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. For

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<sup>416</sup> Kimbel Bouwman. Interview with Daniel “Skid” Mitchell. “A&R at Bad Boy Records for Janelle Monae, Cassie, Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs, Red Café.” ( Oct 25. 2010)” [http://www.hitquarters.com/index.php3?page=interview/opar/interview\\_Daniel\\_Mitchell\\_Interview.html#ixzz3e04sJzmU](http://www.hitquarters.com/index.php3?page=interview/opar/interview_Daniel_Mitchell_Interview.html#ixzz3e04sJzmU) (accessed June 14, 2015).

<sup>417</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 154-155.

example, Janelle Monae, affectionately known as The “Electric Lady,” has a single entitled Q.U.E.E.N. on her self-titled album. Q.U.E.E.N. debuted at No. 5 on the Billboard, and it has received abundant attention because of its liberating message.<sup>418</sup> Monae explains her reason for writing Q.U.E.E.N. in an interview with Fuse HQ stating, “I wanted to create something for people who feel like they want to give up because they're not accepted by society.”<sup>419</sup> Monae has explained what the abbreviation Q.U.E.E.N. stands for: “The “Q” represents the queer community, the “U” is for the untouchables, the “E” for emigrants, the second “E” for the excommunicated and the “N” for those labeled as Negroid.”<sup>420</sup> In keeping with the prophetic tradition of Black female rappers, Monae raps about the gap between the rich and the poor. Monae specifically honors Harriet Tubman,<sup>421</sup> who risked her life to help thousands of Blacks to escape from slavery in South. In the following rap lyrics, Monae speaks about defying categories, how to cope with oppression, and names other Black warriors who have struggled against oppression:

I asked a question like this  
 Are we a lost generation of our people?  
 Add us to equations but they'll never make us equal.  
 She who writes the movie owns the script and the sequel.  
 So why ain't the stealing of my rights made illegal?  
 They keep us underground working hard for the greedy,  
 But when it's time pay they turn around and call us needy.  
 My crown too heavy like the Queen Nefertiti  
 Gimme back my pyramid, I'm trying to free Kansas City.  
 Mixing masterminds like your name Bernie Grundman.  
 Well I'm gonna keep leading like a young Harriet Tubman  
 You can take my wings but I'm still goin' fly  
 And even when you edit me the booty don't lie

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<sup>418</sup> Bouwman, Interview with Daniel “Skid” Mitchell.

<sup>419</sup> Jeff Benjamin, Interview with Janelle Monae.

<http://www.fuse.tv/videos/2013/09/janelle-monae-queen-interview#sthash.8BfVwIi7.dpuf> (accessed June 14, 2015).

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> “Janelle Monae Joins the Cast of Harriet Tubman Biopic.” *Essence*. Accessed February 14, 2019. <https://www.essence.com/entertainment/janelle-monae-joins-harriet-tubman-biopic/>. Monae will play the role of Harriet Tubman in a film being produced in 2019.

Yeah, keep singing and I'mma keep writing songs  
 I'm tired of Marvin asking me, "What's Going On?"  
 March to the streets 'cause I'm willing and I'm able  
 Categorize me, I defy every label  
 And while you're selling dope, we're gonna keep selling hope  
 We rising up now, you gotta deal, you gotta cope  
 Will you be electric sheep?  
 Electric ladies, will you sleep?  
 Or will you preach?<sup>422</sup>

Although there are Black male and female Hip Hop artist who choose to conform to stereotypical gender performance roles that perpetuate archaic ideas of masculinity and femininity, some artists challenge deeply entrenched traditional views of masculinity and femininity that are found in the African American culture, Hip Hop culture, and mainstream America or the media. These artists use their style of dress, music, and their own standards of beauty to combat gender norms. Many times an important part of challenging the status quo in the genre is being a versatile Hip Hop artist who, like Janelle Monae, is able to cross over into other genres. However, the downside to genre crossover is that some people like Cyrus use Hip Hop to validate the gender normativity for capitalistic gain.

According to Tricia Rose, Hip Hop originated with Black male rappers utilizing their visibility to win social status, avoid gang pressures, deal with the loss of neighborhood friends, escape drug addiction, and earn respect from other youth.<sup>423</sup> Black males also utilize rap music to talk about their sexual power over females in a violent way.<sup>424</sup>

### **History of Hip Hop**

Hip Hop culture has deep roots in the oppression, political resistance, communal identity,

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<sup>422</sup> Macy Gray, "Q.U.E.E.N." Lyrics." Janelle Monae. 2013. Accessed November 4, 2015.  
<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/janellemone/queen.html>.

<sup>423</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 2.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

and edification of African Americans, as well as in African American musical heritage.

However, there are some ways in which Hip Hop music has failed women of color and LGBTQ communities. Africana and Cultural Studies Professor Dr. Tricia Rose claims that Hip Hop began as a source of an alternative identity for youth who felt betrayed by the local governmental authority and political figures who destroyed their local recreational facilities. In her book, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Rose notes that many Hip Hop fans established neighborhood groups and “posses”<sup>425</sup> in response to the “demolishment of large sectors of their built environment.”

In the face of the scarcity of resources, African American Hip Hop pioneers creatively used found materials to build the equipment they needed, using garbage can tops as rhythm instruments, tarps to perform on concrete streets, and constructing beatboxes for echoes. Additionally, Hip Hop artists transformed obsolete vocational skills from marginal occupations into entrepreneurial talents of the Hip Hop industry. Rose lists Afro-Caribbean, Puerto Rican and African Americans who in the early stages of Hip Hop, turned occupations like telemarketing, graffiti writing, beatboxing, DJing, and breakdancing into tools that could be utilized.<sup>426</sup> The early rappers, DJs, B-Boys and B-Girls used their bodies to perform and create difficult dance moves in street dance battles and set poetry to music in rap music battles as they all participated in the various neighborhood competitions that fostered their early interests.<sup>427</sup>

These Hip Hop artists were looking to advertise their skills in urban Afro-diasporic communities such as the South Bronx during a time when budget cuts were happening in their public school curriculums, leaving few vocational options upon completing school.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 34-35.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

### **Historical Treatment of Women in Hip Hop**

Although Hip Hop music became a safe haven for youth from Afro-diasporic communities, female exclusion and disenfranchisement did occur in the early onset of Hip Hop. The disenfranchisement of women can be observed through analyzing the different elements that make Hip Hop culture unique. One of those unique elements is defined by Tricia Rose as the writing and drawing of symbols, images, and caricatures by African American and Hispanic youth, called graffiti.<sup>429</sup> This element of Hip Hop style emerged in New York in 1960s, but graffiti writing did not develop on a grand scale of visibility until the 1970s.<sup>430</sup> After teens began to spray their names and the names of their crews all over different neighborhoods, graffiti writing became more elaborate and individualized.<sup>431</sup> The majority of graffiti writers were African American and Hispanic teens. During the 1970s, both male and female writers used their graffiti art as a means of social commentary, but a double standard existed in Hip Hop – females artists were excluded on the basis of their gender. For example, Rose writes that female artists had to protect their sexual reputation, something males did not have to worry about. Rose notes that African American and Hispanic female graffiti writers risked their safety, and their reputation because of the sexist culture of Hip Hop.<sup>432</sup> Male writers spread rumors about female writers in an effort to discourage females from participating.<sup>433</sup> Rose defines how male artists would threaten female writers by initiating violence against their families if they continued to participate in graffiti art battles.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, 51.



Here it is important to note that Rose discusses the complexities of Rap music, and the multi-layered role which rap music plays in the disenfranchisement of women. While she appreciates the positive effect of Hip Hop in the lives of Black youth, Rose opposes sexism and the violent narratives surrounding Black women's bodies in Hip Hop. Rose's efforts include holding Black males accountable for their sexual exploitation of young Black women and the sexual violence in Rap lyrics along with the impact that it has on Black females who are being sexually harassed and assaulted at work. Also, she writes about the implications of Black female bodies treated primarily as being available for male sexual pleasures, which led to sexual violence against Black women becoming normalized and Black youth becoming desensitized to this injustice.

Here is an example of sexual violence against Black women and how a Black man claims to utilize women as disposable sex objects in a Rap lyric. New Orleans-born African American rap artist Curren\$y writes,<sup>435</sup>

We in the house like your closet though I'm in yo b-tch like a spinal chord  
 All up her back n-gga, you don't like that But she love it, thats why she does it  
 Never displaying affection when we out in public Cause mutha- looking, and sh-t'll  
 lookugly So walk right past me homegirl, and do not say nuttin' Secret locations we  
 meet at, and then we cuttin'<sup>107</sup>

In addition to Rap lyrics, Rose critically interrogates sexually degrading Rap videos found on prominent and highly accessible television programming which has global reach, including MTV and other cable television programs. There are also huge American consumer companies like McDonald's, Burger King, Pepsi, Coke, retail stores and athletic shoe stores that

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<sup>435</sup> Brian Petchers. "The Curren\$y Model" Forbes.  
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/brianpetchers/2013/02/07/the-currency-model/> (accessed November, 5, 2015) <sup>107</sup> Lyrics  
 Mana. "Cargo Plane Lyrics Curren\$y" [http://www.lyricsmania.com/cargo\\_planes\\_lyrics\\_curren\\$y.html](http://www.lyricsmania.com/cargo_planes_lyrics_curren$y.html) (accessed  
 November 13, 2015).

thrust forward their corporate agendas by marketing catchy Hip Hop lyrics, since Black culture and Rap music have a persuasive impact on consumption rates.<sup>436</sup> Therefore, sexual violence between Black men and Black women is easily exploited and normalized with constant corporate display of glamorized hostility, aggression, rage and brutality in Rap music. When Hip Hop narratives – which includes sexism, patriarchy, and violence against Black women – are presented, desensitization results because the narratives of domestic violence have infiltrated and become a normal ingredient of American culture which now extends globally through radio, television, and internet. Rose describes how Black men assume sole rights and undeniable access to Black women's bodies; this includes viewing Black women as disposable sex objects and lewd job perks.<sup>437</sup> Rose interviewed Harrell, a Black woman who said that her time as a female Black professional in the Hip Hop industry was littered with sexual harassment and expectations of sexual favors at the demands of Black men. She writes,

For instance, during a meeting with Def Jam execution executives on video shoot, a very famous rapper started lifting up my pants leg trying to rub my leg. I slapped his hand away several times. Later on he stood onstage sticking his tongue out at me in a sexually provocative way – everyone was aware of what he was doing, no one said a word. This happens quite a bit in the music business. Several years ago I had begun producing videos for a video director who made it clear that I could not continue to work with him unless I slept with him. I think that women are afraid to respond to this legally or aggressively, not only because many of us fear professional recriminations, but also because so many of us were molested when we were children. Those experiences complicate our ability to defend ourselves.<sup>438</sup>

Rose's interview with Harrell is a harsh reminder of the sexually inappropriate ways in which Black male rappers have internalized a false sense of ownership of Black women's bodies. This occurs through a sexist and patriarchal narrative that is entrenched in American culture. This narrative presents the Black women as a hypersexual, sexually promiscuous vixen who is

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>437</sup> Rose, 16.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

easily accessible and readily disposable. However, this narrative did not originate with the Black male rapper. Rose reminds Rap music critics that Rap music is America's scapegoat for its deeply entrenched obsession with heterosexual masculine identity, which produces and is responsible for America's deep-seated sexism.<sup>439</sup> Rose contends that critics of Rap music criticize the music as if Rap artists introduced sexism into a sexist-free environment, but sexism and patriarchy were already ingrained into the fabric of American culture before Rap arrived on the scene.<sup>440</sup> Rose provides reasons why she believes sexism in Rap music occurs. Rose writes "the apparent need for some rappers to craft elaborate and creative stories about the abuse and domination of young Black women" is that rappers feel inadequate when rejected by women.<sup>441</sup> Additionally, rap artists are denied access to sustainable economic means; therefore, some rap songs serve as compensation for rejection, while the narratives of sexual domination "falsely relieve lack of self-worth and limited access to economic and social markers for heterosexual masculine power."<sup>442</sup> There are many rappers who create stories of sexual conquest due to their need of validation and self-esteem; instead, the reality is Hip Hop is only a mirror of the rapper's societal experience. The sexual exploitation of young Black women found in the Hip Hop industry must be continuously examined on a more critical scale around gender, sex, and consent. Rose is calling for the way in which Black women's bodies are perceived and interacted with to be challenged through public discourse, but not by the means of placing patriarchy and sexism in Rap music solely at the feet of Rappers. This research specifically focuses on Black religious authorities and communities creating a discourse in churches about how heterosexual identities are one of many healthy ways of being.

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

### **That's Gay, I Aint Into Liking Dudes No Way:<sup>443</sup> Homophobia –A Trait of Hip Hop Culture**

Part of Hip Hop culture's perpetuation of heteronormativity as the standard for sexual relationships is evident in the perpetuation of homophobia. Hip Hop has traditionally been an unwelcoming place for gay people, and the genre's traditionally overt homophobia has made it the musical genre in which anti-gay sentiments and slurs are most prevalent and acceptable. An example of homophobia in rap music is in the lyrics below:

"Now, I never had my dick sucked by a man befo', but you gone be the first, you little trick-ass ho."

The artist, who goes by the name of DJ Quick, released this song entitled "Dollaz and Sense" on his 1995 album "Safe and Sound." In the lyrics, DJ Quick is referring to another male, but associates him with a woman by utilizing the term "trick-ass ho." He is referring to a male enemy providing him phalacio, which in this context is seen as an act of submission, thereby simultaneously equating the male enemy of the rapper to a woman and calling women lesser.

In African American communities hetero-normativity is often understood as the model the sex act, not the relationship itself. It is this idea that makes homosexual intercourse a threat to masculinity. Within that same framework, masculinity is threatened when a man is feminine and therefore submissive, subjective, and objectifiable. Historically there are many factors that hinder the progress of Black men in America, including racism, employment discrimination, and social oppression. Field echoes the sentiments of other Black masculinity theorists by

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<sup>443</sup> "La, La, La (Excuse Me Again)," (2014), <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jayz/lalalaexcusemeagain.html> (November 18, 2014)"

interpreting Black male expressions of sexual prowess and physical dominance as a need to assert their masculinity. Below is a chart that describes how Black men who exhibit a marginalized sense of masculinity construct heteronormative masculine views. These views originated out of a response Fields describes as originating from a sense of “powerlessness through an exaggeration of masculine conventions.”<sup>444</sup>

Black males in a racist, socioeconomic oppressive environment are, as noted by Fields who is a theorist of Black masculinity – a group attempting to survive conflict in a Euro-American paradigm that constantly defines what manhood means. However, it is important to note that a few rappers in the Hip Hop culture have come to the defense of diverse sexualities which lets us know that there is hope for Hip Hop via those who are willing to be courageous and stand for the liberty of all humanity. For example, Lil B, whose birth name is Brandon McCartney, is a new, up and coming artist who has gained millions of followers online.<sup>445</sup> He is pushing boundaries of sexuality with his support of the LGBTQI community and the right for people to be who they are, going so far as to title his latest album “I’m Gay.”<sup>446</sup> Although he is heterosexual, and has defended his sexuality during numerous interviews, he has been receiving death threats about his sexuality. He welcomes discourse that will expand the archaic and closed-minded nature of Hip Hop culture.<sup>447</sup>

Frank Ocean, an R&B singer with close ties to the young L.A. rap crew OFWGKTA, made public a same-sex romantic relationship.<sup>448</sup> However, the progress surrounding his

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<sup>444</sup> Fields, “Racial Identity,” 48.

<sup>445</sup> “Lil B,” (2014), <http://www.mtv.com/artists/lil-b/>, (November 18, 2014).

<sup>446</sup> “Lil B’s ‘I’m Gay’ Album Title Results In Death Threats,” (2011), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/24/lil-bs-im-gay-album-title-death-threats\\_n\\_852994.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/24/lil-bs-im-gay-album-title-death-threats_n_852994.html), (accessed November 18, 2014).

<sup>447</sup> “Rapper Lil B on ‘I’m Gay’: ‘We’re all one people,’” (2011), <http://www.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/Music/05/24/lil.b.album/>, (accessed November 18, 2014).

<sup>448</sup> Rich Juzwiak, “Why 2013 Was Hip- Hop’s ‘Faggot’ Spring,” (2013), <http://gawker.com/why-2013-was-hip-hop-s-faggot-spring-1484894585>, (November 19, 2014).

courageous declaration of his sexual identity prompted many other well-known Black male rappers to display their discomfort and homophobia because of the new models for queerness in Hip Hop being expressed. Rapper and actor The Game is best known as a rapper in the West Coast Hip Hop scene. Below is the seriously homophobic song “Bigger Than Me,” in which The Game openly disapproves of Frank Ocean’s sexual identity as a gay Black man.

### **Bigger Than Me<sup>449</sup>**

Voice crack when you talk ass niggas  
 Rolling blunts for them boss as niggas  
 I came in with Ye', Jeezy and boss ass niggas  
 Your Freshman cover a whole bunch of soft ass niggas  
 Tampon lyricists, evacuate the premises  
 Mute BET Cyphers, cause I don't wanna hear that shit  
 May you Rest in Piss, you fuck niggas  
 Aye, Frank Ocean go ahead and fuck these niggas (yeah they fuck niggas)  
 Ain't no 3 stacks in your class  
 Take your Top 10 spot and shove it up your ass,  
 bitch boy Niggas already fucked your bitch, you bitch boy  
 And every time you kiss your bitch you suck my dick, bitch boy  
 And when you buy that ho a bag that bitch carry my bricks, bitch boy [Hook]  
 Eh Frank Ocean go ahead and fuck these fuck niggas  
 "Ying, ying, ying" on a motherfucker  
 "Ying, ying, ying" on a motherfucker  
 Drop your single, I drop dreams on that motherfucker  
 I should let my daughter scream on this motherfucker  
 The industry soft, I should let Miguel sing on this motherfucker

Lord Jamar of the '90s politically minded Hip Hop group Brand Nubian posted online about a skirt worn by rapper, producer, actor Kanye West to a benefit show at Madison Square

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<sup>449</sup> “Bigger Than Me,” (2014), <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/game/biggerthanme.html>, (November 18, 2014).

Garden.<sup>450</sup> Jamar writes that by wearing a skirt, Kanye has “emasculated himself.”<sup>451</sup> The Brand Nubian rap trailblazer displays his blatant disrespect through homophobic rants in his new track “Lift Up Your Skirt.”<sup>452</sup>

Somebody mad at my hashtag Black man lookin' half a fag With a blazer and vest  
 I'm just amazed at the mess  
 Pioneer of this queer shit is Kanye West  
 He introduced the skinny jeans to the rap scene Then he wore a fucking skirt on the video  
 screen Then he wore it again at a memorial  
 I can't pretend that this shit ain't deplorable I bet this nigga thinkin' he looking adorable  
 Your music's good but your ego is horrible I rebuke all this gay shit  
 Some are scared to say shit You might lay and take this But I'm not to be played with

As we survey the rap music lyrics above, we see that homophobia is quite prevalent and pervasive in the African American community, especially as espoused by Hip Hop Music. This is attributed to the heteronormative, sex-censored teachings of Black churches. Also attributed as one of the causes of homophobia is the image particularly young Black males rappers are supposed to convey in the public sphere.

In her article entitled “Aristotle On Women.” Helen Tierney writes:<sup>453</sup>

Clearly, though, the first major composer of this music on a grand scale for Western consciousness was Aristotle. Thinkers before him in his own culture had written chords (light and rationality are male; darkness and irrationality are female) and even themes (“Silence is a woman's glory”), but Aristotle integrated fragments from his predecessors with the work of his own inventive genius to create the first symphony of sexism. Combining his ontological judgment that the nature of something is what it is “when fully developed” (*Politics*, 1252b. 32-34) with his biological assumption that the fully developed human is male, he concluded that woman “is as it were a deformed male” (*Generation of Animals*, 737a. 28). What makes woman a physically defective human is her inability to produce semen, which, according to Aristotle, is the only active principle in conception. In procreation, therefore, *passive* woman provides only material, which *active* man fashions into a new human.

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<sup>450</sup> Rich Juzwiak, “Kanye West Is the 'Pioneer of This Queer Shit,' Says Homophobe Rapper” (2013), <http://gawker.com/5981601/kanye-west-is-the-pioneer-of-this-queer-shit-says-homophobe-rapper>, (November 19, 2014).

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Helen Tierney, ed., *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, (Greenwood Press, 2002), <http://gem.greenwood.com/wse/wsePrint.jsp?id=id49> (November 20, 2014).

### Aristotle's Influence on Attitudes toward Women

In Aristotle's *Politics*, Tierney reminds the reader: "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior, one rules and the other is ruled; this principle of necessity extends to all mankind"<sup>454</sup> With this assertion, Aristotle leaves no doubt concerning the subordinate role of women. The philosopher clearly states that the relation between the man and woman is that of superior to inferior, one is to rule and the other is to be ruled. Marian Cline Horowitz, has drawn attention to the philosopher's sexist views in her paper "Aristotle and Woman."<sup>455</sup> Horowitz makes a connection between Aristotle and anti-feminism<sup>456</sup> and the standard Western arguments for the inferiority of the female and the political and social subordination of females to males domestically and abroad.<sup>457</sup> Horowitz notes "Aristotle's definition of a 'female as a mutilated male' was transmitted into biological, obstetrical, and theological tracts."<sup>458</sup> As a result, Aristotle and his followers continued his work through spreading myths as if his research were fact. Horowitz notes that Aristotle's writings on "biological sexism influenced many human beings' perceptions of themselves and their offspring [and that] his political sexism influenced their beliefs on the proper distribution of roles in society."<sup>459</sup> About Aristotle's misogynist ideas, Cynthia Freeland writes:

Aristotle says that the courage of a man lies in commanding, a woman's lies in obeying; that 'matter yearns for form, as the female for the male and the ugly for the beautiful';

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> M.C. Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women" in *The Journal of the History of Biology* Vol. 9 No. 2 (Autumn, 1976), 183-213.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.



that women have fewer teeth than men; that a female is an incomplete male or ‘as it were, a deformity’: which contributes only matter and not form to the generation of offspring; that in general a woman is perhaps an inferior being’; that female characters in a tragedy will be inappropriate if they are too brave or too clever.<sup>460</sup>

Feminist scholar María Luisa Femenías writes in her article “Women and Natural Hierarchy in Aristotle”<sup>461</sup> that on the subject of household rule, Aristotle takes up the question of the proper forms of rule over women and children. As with the master's rule over the slave, and humanity's rule over plants and other animals, Aristotle defines these kinds of rule in terms of natural hierarchies: “[T]he male, unless constituted in some respect contrary to nature, is by nature more expert at leading than the female, and the elder complete than the younger and incomplete.”<sup>462</sup> This means that it is natural for the male to rule: “[T]he relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled.”<sup>463</sup>

Caroline Whitbeck writes that the two most influential philosophers, both in the Greco-Roman world into which Christianity was born and in the world of Christian theology of the Middle Ages, were Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle's main thrust was to explain the nature of things from what they are seen to be. From the subject and low status of women he deduced their inferiority by nature. She describes the reason Aristotle believed that women's inferiority lies in a defect. She writes that Aristotle believed that “Women are defective by nature”<sup>464</sup> because they cannot reproduce semen which was mistakenly believed to contain a full human being. When a man and a woman have intercourse, said Aristotle, the man supplies the substance of a human

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<sup>460</sup> Cynthia A., Freeland, *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994) 145-146.

<sup>461</sup> María Luisa Femenías, “Women and Natural Hierarchy in Aristotle,” *Hypatia* 9, no. 1 (1994), page 167 [http://jj7vr7vp5c.search.serialssolutions.com/directLink?&atitle=Women+and+natural+hierarchy+in+Aristotle&author=Femenias%2c+Maria+Luisa&issn=08875367&title=Hypatia&volume=9&issue=1&date=1994-01-01&spage=164&id=doi:&sid=ProQ\\_ss&genre=article](http://jj7vr7vp5c.search.serialssolutions.com/directLink?&atitle=Women+and+natural+hierarchy+in+Aristotle&author=Femenias%2c+Maria+Luisa&issn=08875367&title=Hypatia&volume=9&issue=1&date=1994-01-01&spage=164&id=doi:&sid=ProQ_ss&genre=article) (November 20, 2014).

<sup>462</sup> Ibid,

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Caroline Whitbeck, “Theories of Sex Difference,” in *Women and Philosophy: Toward a Theory of Liberation*, ed. Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1976), 57-58.

being (the soul, i.e. the form), the woman only the nourishment (the matter).

Aristotle applied the fundamental principle that “form” and “matter” are the two components in every being, with “form” being superior to ‘matter.’ His conclusion was that in sexual reproduction the ‘form’ (the male) was separate from and superior to the one who supplied the ‘matter’ (the female).<sup>465</sup> Thus the ‘lower’ is not mingled with the ‘higher’ in the same individual.<sup>466</sup> Aristotle subscribed to what Caroline Whitbeck has called the ‘flower pot theory’ of human generation.<sup>467</sup> The female, since she is deficient in natural heat, is unable to ‘cook’ her menstrual fluid to the point of refinement, at which it would become semen (i.e. ‘seed’).<sup>468</sup> Therefore her only contribution to the embryo is its matter, and a ‘field’ in which it can grow. Her inability to produce semen is her deficiency: ‘A woman,’ Aristotle concluded, ‘is as it were an infertile male’ (Generation of Animals, I, 728a).<sup>469</sup> ‘A male is male in virtue of a particular ability, and a female in virtue of a particular inability’ (Generation of Animals, I, 82f).<sup>470</sup>

In *The Possibility a Christian Appropriation of Aristotle’s Ethical Philosophy*, Charlie Ritch writes “the Christian tradition has historically relied on Aristotle’s philosophy to provide a conceptual basis for the articulation of its own ethical doctrines.”<sup>471</sup> Also, the church continues to rely on Aristotle’s formulation of theological doctrine.<sup>472</sup> Mark Beuving, Practical Theologian and Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, writes that Aristotle had a huge impact on

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Charlie Ritch, *The Possibility of a Christian Appropriation of Aristotle’s Ethical Philosophy*. (2004). Aporia, vol. 14, 15.  
[http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/ritch-the\\_possibility\\_of\\_a\\_christian\\_appropriation\\_of\\_aristotles\\_ethical\\_philosophy.pdf](http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/ritch-the_possibility_of_a_christian_appropriation_of_aristotles_ethical_philosophy.pdf)  
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<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 45.

the church. In this work he considers that impact<sup>473</sup> He writes:

For much of church history, the world we live in has been shaped by Aristotle's influence—not only outside of the church, but inside as well. Classical philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle influenced early Christian thinkers. Early philosophers and religious thinkers both competed with and borrowed from each other to further explain and understand their beliefs. Early Christians intertwined their beliefs with classical learning, science and philosophy, including ideas such as Gregory's account of the Trinity revolves around Aristotle's idea that things could be divided into categories and qualities.

There is a great deal of scholarly debate about what Aristotle means about the female “lacking authority,” although Aristotle does not elaborate on it; some have suggested that it means not that woman's reasoning ability is inferior to that of men but that women lack the ability to make men do what they want, either because of some innate psychological characteristic (they are not aggressive and/or assertive enough) or because of the prevailing culture in Greece at the time.

Others suggest it means women's emotions are ultimately more influential than reason in determining their behavior. I will point out the vicious circle in which many women still find themselves because of Aristotle's teachings that are passed on through Black churches. There is a connection between Aristotle's advocating men having authority over women and the treatment of women in the Black church. This belief means that women are denied access to certain areas of life (such as politics). When Black women are ostracized and denied access to pulpits, ordination processes, and teaching and administrative positions, they do not receive the same opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to become proficient in them. This unequal access to knowledge and skills then becomes evidence for oppressive and sexist Black church

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<sup>473</sup> Mark Beuving, “How Aristotle Messed Up the Church,” *Theology for Real Life* Faculty Blog (blog), Mark Beuving, July 19, 2012, [http://facultyblog.ernitybiblecollege.com/2012/07/how-aristotle-messed-up-the-church/#.VHD6k4vF\\_uo](http://facultyblog.ernitybiblecollege.com/2012/07/how-aristotle-messed-up-the-church/#.VHD6k4vF_uo).

systems to reinforce the original belief that Black women are inferior to their Black male counterparts. However, many times Black women pursue alternative career routes in efforts to cultivate and utilize theological, critical thinking, and administrative skills. For example, Black women who are treated unfairly by Black churches plant their own churches, teach in seminaries and religion departments in universities, become seminary presidents, and create faith-based nonprofits. Black women creatively and successfully redirect their skills inside and outside of the Black church domain, but continue to keep their faith commitments but many times through alternative routes.

In her article, “Black Theology and the Black Women,” Jacquelyn Grant, African American feminist, systematic theologian and minister, writes that Blacks progressed from the slave culture where women and male slaves both had “equality in their inequality.”<sup>474</sup> Grant writes that both Black men and Black women in the slave community were demeaned as “sharing the characteristics of ‘emotionality and irrationality.’”<sup>475</sup> Grant discusses the deepening schism between Black men and Black women as Black men have sought to empower themselves by using the standards of the White male-dominated society. In doing so, they further perpetuated Western Eurocentric standards of “beauty” and “ugliness.”<sup>476</sup> This further created a rift in Black communities, because the Eurocentric standard of “blond hair and blue eyes” further isolates and psychologically castrates Black women.<sup>477</sup> She challenges Black men to critique the White-dominated theology that is divisive and oppressive and has also been characterized by its readiness to embrace Black enslavement and has carved no place for Black women.<sup>478</sup> She

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<sup>474</sup> Jacquelyn Grant, “Black Woman and Black Theology,” in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, ed. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 846.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 833.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 835.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

challenges Black men to not address racist stereotypes without being attentive to sexist ideologies that are equally oppressive to women.

### **It's My Body and I Do What I Want: The Treatment of Black Women's Bodies in Hip Hop How do Black Women's Bodies Come into the Equation?**

Aristotle's views on women affected the entire Western European society. It is obvious that Christians who accepted the view that women are inferior by nature, could not envisage this deformed being in leadership roles in the church, nor society in general. When it comes to the treatment of the Black woman's bodies by white men, the results are sadly even more gruesome than their treatment of white women. Let us examine the sexual abuse perpetrated by white males against Black female slaves in Western European history and how this connects to the ways in which Black males treat Black women in Hip Hop music. For example, in the Western European medical community Sara "Saartjie" Baartman was the most famous of at least two Black Khoikhoi women who were exhibited as freak show attractions in 19th-century Europe under the name Hottentot Venus — a pejorative term used to mock the Khoi people. Hottentot is now itself considered an offensive term, and "Venus" was in reference to the Roman goddess of love. According to Alton Pollard,<sup>479</sup> Saartjie Baartman was born in 1789 in Eastern Cape, Baartman also known as Sara, was a member of South Africa's indigenous first people the Khoisa. Enslaved in the Western Cape capital of Cape Town, Baartman was stolen from her homeland, and taken to London and then to Paris.<sup>480</sup> Her owner's primary source of income was

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<sup>479</sup> Alton B. Pollard, III, "Teaching the Body: Sexuality and the Black Church" in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic* ed. by Anthony Pinn and Dwight Hopkins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004), 320.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 320.

placing her naked body to be gawked at for a price by European high society from 1810-1816.<sup>481</sup>

Sara was advertised as a biological oddity; her anatomy, normative for aboriginal peoples, was used to satisfy white sexual inquiries about African women and to reinforce notions of white supremacy.<sup>482</sup>

Saarjies Baartman died at the age of twenty-five, impoverished and alone. She died six thousand miles away from her homeland. When Sara died the British medical community dissected her genitalia, brain, and her skeleton was preserved. Pollard writes that Sara Baartman's story is one that exposes "the social political, scientific and philosophical assumption which transformed one young woman into a representation of savage sexuality and racial inferiority." Additionally the horrifying manner in which Sara was treated by Europeans serves as a reminder of the sexualization of the Black female body throughout Western history.<sup>483</sup> Beginning in 1662, Southern colonies and states adopted into law the principle of "partus sequitur ventrem," by which children of enslaved Black women took the status of their mothers, regardless of the father's identity.<sup>484</sup> When considering slaves, Colonial Virginians abandoned the English tradition of "partus sequitur patrem" (one's status was determined by the their father's status) in favor of the Roman principle of partus sequitur ventrem.<sup>485</sup> Thus offspring of slave women were the property of their mother's owner whether fathered by a freeman or not. Annette Gordon-Reed, in her book *The Hemingses of Monticello*, speculates on why Virginian colonists made up this particular form of slavery that endured until the Civil

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>484</sup> Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 193.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid, 193.

War.<sup>486</sup> She notes:

White men, particularly the ones who made up the House of Burgesses, the legislature in colonial Virginia, were the masters of a growing number of African women, owning not only their labor but their very bodies. That these women sometimes would be used for sex as well as work must have occurred to the Burgesses. Inevitably offspring would arise from some of these unions. Even white males who owned no slaves could contribute to the problem by producing, with enslaved Black women, children who would be born free, thus destroying a critical component of the master's property rights: the ability to capture the value of the "increase" when female slaves gave birth. The rape of female slaves was also motivated by the wish to increase the slave population, particularly after the 1808 federal ban on the importation of slaves, and in light of competition in cotton production from western states.<sup>487</sup>

The sexual abuse of slaves was partially rooted in a patriarchal Southern culture which treated Black women as property or chattel.<sup>488</sup> While free or white women could charge their perpetrators with rape, enslaved Black women had no legal recourse.<sup>489</sup> Their bodies technically belonged to their owners by law. By the nineteenth century, popular writing in the South characterized female slaves as lustful and promiscuous "Jezebels,"<sup>490</sup> who shamelessly tempted white owners into sexual relations. Many female slaves, called "fancy maids," were sold at auction into concubinage or prostitution, which was termed the "fancy trade."<sup>491</sup>

Although Angela Grant and Jacquelyn Davis scholars noted for their research in the fields of race, gender, and class debated whether or not black women and black men<sup>492</sup> had the opportunity to have "equality in inequality in the slave community."<sup>493</sup> I argue that despite

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<sup>486</sup> Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 46.

<sup>487</sup> Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 193-194.

<sup>488</sup> Dannell Moon, "Slavery," in *Encyclopedia of Rape*, ed. Merril D. Smith., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 234.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>490</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 29-31.

<sup>491</sup> Moon, 235.

<sup>492</sup> Grant, 833.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*

common factors, the circumstances of enslavement were different for Black women because the Black women's primary social role was that of child bearer. It was an economic advantage for the slave master, who multiplied his labor force through slave pregnancy.<sup>494</sup> The exploitation of the black female body by white slave masters caused huge rifts in Black families. Oftentimes white masters would rape married women. The inability of the slave husband to provide protection for his wife from sexual exploitation and rape deprived him of his masculinity.<sup>495</sup> As a result, the restrictions of the laws of slavery, and the circumstances of the slavery system crafted a sense of imbalance of power between Black males and females.

African American sociologist Edward Franklin Frazier in his work *The Negro Family in the United States* reports on the role of the Black father's authority after emancipation from slavery, and how it was followed by the economic subordination of the [Black] woman.<sup>496</sup> In some situations, the Black male's authority was a continuation of the slavery system and he was interested in the permanent stability of being with a wife and children *only* if it involved the acquisition of property. E. Franklin Frazier writes:

the freedmen during the Civil War observed that many men were exceedingly jealous of [the Black woman's] newly acquired authority in family relations and insisted upon a recognition of their superiority over women.<sup>497</sup>

Although the end of slavery marked freedom to worship and to have independent Black Church leadership, freedom for the Black man became sexism and oppression to the church-going Black woman, especially those who desired clerical positions. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes writes in *The Roles of Church and Community Mothers* that slaves came from a social system where men and

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<sup>494</sup> Follett, Richard, "'Lives of Living Death': The Reproductive Lives of Slave Women in the Cane World of Louisiana," *Slavery & Abolition* 26, no. 2 (August 2005): 289-304. America: History & Life, EBSCOhost (November 12, 2014).

<sup>495</sup> Moon, 236-237.

<sup>496</sup> Edward Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 140.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 127.



women shared power in various ways, but most often through economic interdependence.<sup>498</sup>

### **How Does Sexism Manifest in Black Church Congregations?**

Grant writes about the invisibility of Black women in Black Church communities and how the struggle for official acceptance of Black female pastors and preachers continues to be hindered by Black males<sup>499</sup> because of antiquated church doctrine about women being “lesser than men.” In *African-American Religion Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham writes about the importance of women in the Black church institution as the ones who “broad[en] the public arm of the church.”<sup>500</sup> Additionally, Higginbotham writes that the church has been “the most effective vehicle by which men and women alike, pushed down by racism and poverty, regrouped and rallied against emotional and physical defeat.”<sup>501</sup> In addition to dispelling racism on the outside, Black women also had to fight to dispel sexism in the church by demanding equal rights for Black women. Higginbotham writes that they advocated equal rights through political action by speaking on voter registration and equal employment opportunities. She writes that Black women make up the largest demographics of all Black church denominations.<sup>502</sup> However, Black men chose to treat Black women as unequal in relationship to them. Higginbotham writes:

Black Baptist churchmen certainly recognized the importance of women’s active support

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<sup>498</sup> Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “The Roles of Church and Community Mothers: Ambivalent American Sexism or Fragmented African Familyhood?” in *African-American Religion Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. by Timothy E Fulop & Albert J Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1997), 367.

<sup>499</sup> Eric C. Lincoln “The Black Church and Women,” in *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 307.

<sup>500</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “The Black Church: A Gendered Perspective” in *African- American Religion Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* ed Timothy E Fulop & Albert J Raboteau (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 203.

<sup>501</sup> Higginbotham, “The Black Church, 203.”

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

for the denominational efforts toward racial self-help and self-reliance. Yet male-based traditions and the rules of decorum sought to mute women's voices and accentuate their subordinate status vis-a-vis men. Thus tainted by the values of the larger American society, the Black church sought to provide men with full manhood rights, while offering women a separate and unequal status....the Black Baptist women's own ideas were concerning separate roles for men and women – or the approximate sexual division of labor – they would not lightly accept their own subordination in the struggle of their people.<sup>503</sup>

Black Baptist women built a space for themselves to discuss issues that impacted their well-being entitled the Women's Convention 1900. This sisterhood existed inside of a larger Black denominational patriarchal structure called the National Baptist Convention. These women raised money through this women's organization to start a school as well. It is from within this religious sphere that Black women challenged the racism they endured from white America, and the oppression they faced from Black men inside the church.<sup>504</sup>

This women's movement gave Black women in the Baptist church collective strength to fight against gender oppression in their churches. In my research, I argue that patriarchal and sexist ideas about Black women were not invented by Black males, but are perpetuated by them in the Black Church and Hip Hop music. The subhuman narratives about Black women, I will argue, were begun by white males. Specifically Aristotle's philosophical doctrine of the women as a deformed male entered into church doctrine in pre-slavery times and found its way into Black Church worship. Black men attempt to keep up with a European model of masculinity that was forced upon them by white males who socioeconomically oppress them. Black males rightly react against this constant emasculation by whites. They also felt a need to compensate for what was perceived as loss of authority in the Black familial system. Black men and Black women were equal on the slave plantation. Therefore in a society where males are privileged, Black

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid, 205

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

males have sought out places where they would hold ultimate authority. As a result, Black Church worship spaces have become sites where the internalized racism, patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia of white society are brought to bear against Black women and the LGBTQI+ community. The prohibition against Black women having leadership roles in male-dominated Black Churches, in the Hip Hop industry, reflect the sense of Black males that respect for their masculinity is being eroded by white society. The socioeconomic oppression forced on Black males by whites males was internalized by Black men. In an effort to gain some sense of authority, they have isolated and oppressed Black women and disdained queer people. In turn, Black women internalized these patriarchal, racialized, sexist narratives about themselves.

Nevertheless, the Black Baptist Women's movement of the 1900s gave women the collective strength to fight against gender oppression in Black churches. Although Black women of this movement were of different classes, and had different beliefs about respectability politics, they lifted each other up and bonded together because they realized that they faced the same injustices. They realized the liberation of all Black women was necessarily linked. The implication in forming a collective movement is that although there are diverse voices and conflicting ideals in regard to politics and values, members of the collective come together in order to make a difference in each other's lives. This collective is active now, addressing the needs of Black women and the queer community. Katrina Bell McDonald describes the class differences and competitive challenges within the job market, impacting marriage prospects, and including class differences that Black women encounter that have kept them at odds with the church. The members of the movement faced these challenges as they organized and attempted to present a common agenda. In her work, McDonald writes about discord among black women:

Discordant sentiment and experience among these [Black] women largely reflects the varying ways in which they work to fully immunize themselves against the public's general negative regard for them, a public sentiment that stems from a complex and denigrating mythology about black women. Internalizing this oppression frequently produces intragroup tension and at times evokes conscious and unconscious discriminative behavior towards those whose skin tone, body type, wardrobe, hairstyle, and so on African American women have been programmed to reject.<sup>505</sup>

McDonald makes a great case for how Black women banded together to ignite and successfully sustain movements despite class differences, ideals, and the black males who accepted a patriarchal, racist, paradigm that ostracized Black women.

### **Black Male Spirituality and Sexuality**

As seen in the Black Church experience, Black male spirituality is largely interconnected to his sexuality. In their article, "The Black Church and Women" C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya write about the absence of Black males in the church.<sup>506</sup> The authors note that Black male youth receive messages from older Black men about Black women being responsible for preserving culture and the religious education of Black children. Henceforth, Black male youth are socialized into viewing active church participation as a sign of effeminate behavior.<sup>507</sup> The messages from older Black males to young Black males once they reach a certain age is:

"Time to be a man and learn the ways of the world. Leave the church to the women."<sup>508</sup>

Although Black church demographics continue to report a women's majority, there is most often a male senior pastor. In this instance, women who desire pastoral and leadership roles

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<sup>505</sup> Katrina Bell McDonald, *Embracing Sisterhood: Class, Identity, and Contemporary Black Women* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 10.

<sup>506</sup> Lincoln "The Black Church and Women," 304.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

have to protest and even then, they rarely receive the positions.<sup>509</sup> Here I draw upon data from Dr. Courtney Pace, the Lyon Church History professor who provides resourceful evidence to prove that African American women currently working in ecclesiastical institutions have to protest if they want to obtain pastoral and other administrative leadership roles. They do not receive positions they apply for and the positions they do receive are lower paying than positions held by their Black male and white female counterparts. Lyons writes,

In American society, African American women typically rank lower and earn less than African American men and white women, have fewer opportunities for educational or professional advancement, and expend significant personal resources serving their families and churches. Ministry is no different. African American Baptist women in ministry face tremendous obstacles to formal ministry placement and recognition; African American church membership is at least 75% female, yet women make less than 10% of church leadership and about 1% of African American Baptist pastors...First, the number of African American women receiving seminary education is increasing. Since the 1970s, African American women have jumped from 5% to nearly 8% of all seminarians and from 5% to 49% of all African American seminarians. Since the 1970s, African American women have increased their seminary enrollment by 1000%.<sup>510</sup>

While enduring these sexist situations, Black women who challenge this gendered oppressive ecclesiastical system still do not receive the positions they want even though they are qualified.

Additionally, shortages of Black males are seen in the church as well as within the larger Black community.<sup>511</sup> Reasons for the absence of Black males in their communities include premature death as the result of racism, poverty, homicide and high dropout rates, as well as highly disproportionate incarceration rates, and high military enlistment rates.<sup>512</sup> Furthermore, the absence of the Black male is evident in the reduction of Black partnerships including dating

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 294. In this section the authors list the Black male clergy who disapproved of Black women as pastors of churches and how they referenced biblical support for their beliefs.

<sup>510</sup> Courtney Lyons, "Breaking Through the Extra-Thick Stained-Glass Ceiling: African American Baptist Women in Ministry" in *Review & Expositor* 110:2 (Winter 2013): 77-92.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 305-306.

and married life.<sup>513</sup> The absence of Black males gives rise to the phenomenon of the female head-of-household.<sup>514</sup> However, in the instances when Black men are able to exist in and maintain relationships, there seems to be a warped understanding of gender roles which the Black church affirms. The hierarchical patterns of relationships that the Black church affirms contributes to the inequality between the sexes instead of a relationship of egalitarianism. This hierarchical pattern of male dominance is perpetuated in the church and therefore transferred into Black male understanding of relationship. However, church-sponsored activities could help to transform the male-dominated paradigm if perhaps there were church dramatizations enacted that featured Black men doing laundry, cooking, washing dishes when his wife or his sister was at work. If young Black boys were exposed during their formative years to images of Black males engaging in stereotypically female chores, this would begin to shift much of the theologically archaic and conservative ideas around gender roles in Black church spaces. As stated earlier, the ideology that males are superior to females originated with Aristotelian thought, can be traced through Christian tradition, and then found its way into what became the traditional understandings of Black male sexuality.<sup>515</sup> African-American church tradition has valued “masculine” over more “feminine” characteristics. Perhaps that is because one aspect of their lives in which post-slavery Black males perceive themselves to have any power is their physical bodies. Therefore, the bodies of Black males provide a limited but important base on which they can establish power and inner trust necessary for developing and maintaining intimate relationships.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> Merle Longwood, “Male Sexuality: Moving Beyond the Myths,” *Christian Century* 105, no. 12 (1988), 363.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

Contemporary Arts at Manchester Metropolitan University. In his article *What's the Problem with Black Masculinities*, Clennon describes the complications with asserting this problematic form of masculinity in efforts to debunk it.

Additionally, Clennon presents other ways of being male along with other styles of masculinity which includes being homosexual, bi-sexual, and other gender and sexual modalities.<sup>517</sup>

Clennon presents the idea that there are ways for Black men to have positive and sensitive interactions with other men without feeling threatened, feeling defensive, or feeling sexual competition between them. These different ways of being Black and male provides alternatives to the hierarchical and patriarchal model that is presented in Black church leadership as well as some Black familial models. This hierarchical and patriarchal model of being Black and male is transferred to Black intimate relationships as men assert their authority and power in unhealthy sexual and physical ways, which, for many, results in domestic and verbal abuse. In many instances, Black males live up to culturally fed stereotypical images of how Black masculinity is intended to be lived and allow themselves to be betrayed by the media. Clennon terms this media portrayal of Black masculinity “market branding of Black hyper masculinity.”<sup>518</sup> As an example of the hyper-masculine Black male image being commodified and consumed Clennon writes about the glorification of violence against Black males by other Black males in urban popular culture and Hip Hop music.<sup>519</sup> Clennon writes:

I would argue that as patriarchy is racialized, we can discern its contemporary workings

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<sup>517</sup> Ornette D. Clennon, “What’s the Problem with Black Masculinities?” *Academic Space/Media Diversified* (blog), November 18, 2013 (12:23 a.m.), <http://mediadiversified.org/2013/11/18/whats-the-problem-with-Black-masculinities>

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

in the market objectification or fetishisation of the Black male body. The market fetishisation of the Black male physique means that Black men are necessarily kept on a perverse pedestal of hyper masculinity. There is little scope to explore other aspects of what makes a man a man – whatever that may be. Jackson[iii] talks about the iconography of the Black male physique that is only allowed to be desired (by the white male gaze[iv]) through its visual depictions of woundedness, in the Hip Hop glorification of the gunshot wound, for example.<sup>520</sup>

His research reveals a disturbing correlation with the objectification of Black women's bodies.

He writes:

The power of this version of Black masculinity is such that westernized men (and women) are falling under the spell of Black priapism and aspiring to this limiting commercial branding of masculinity that pivots on homophobia, misogyny and emotional infantilism. As Black men, we run the risk of limiting ourselves socially and emotionally. For instance, a study of young people in the UK by psychologists Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman found that the valorization of Black boys as hyper masculine – physical, sporty and super-cool – also involved the rejection of the pursuit of intellectual activities as “gay.” In other areas of social life such as family relationships, there is little room for the Black man to be considered a “father” because in the archetype he is only expected to sire offspring using his superior reproductive powers. The Black man is not expected to be a “husband,” rather as a stud or breeding machine he is expected to be sexually profligate. So resisting and not conforming to this deeply embedded social and archetypal narrative is to open oneself to marginalization or worse still, abuse and violence. Even though more versions of Black masculinity are now being forged as Black men resist dominant stereotypes, difficult questions remain.<sup>521</sup>

Clennon argues correctly that in attempts to debunk marginalized forms of masculinity, Black males cannot escape the sexual tropes that are racist, patriarchal, and devoid of emotionalism because it does not allow space for Black males who express different forms of sexual orientations to exist without heavy forms of criticism, using the hyper masculine Black male body as the rubric.

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.



### **What lyrics will I use to display misogyny in Hip Hop music against women?**

Hip-Hop music is by no means the only music genre that contains lyrical content which is misogynistic, patriarchal, and homophobic, but it is the only genre used to exploit and oppress an entire group of people via commercialism and commodification of the African American culture. However, Hip Hop music's viability continues to be its powerful history and interconnectedness with the struggle of African Americans and their Puerto Rican and Hispanic co-laborers. Hip Hop continues to be an evolving creative force of emotional expressions designed by females and males of transnational origins. Hip Hop music tells the story of hurt, pain, and joy of particular communal and familial minority groups. If it is true that a diverse range of human emotions are included in Hip Hop music lyrics, then the subject of Black sexuality is not exempt from the lyrical conversation. Hip Hop's lyrical expressions obviously includes sexually provocative and erotic interpretations of human sexuality, which often contains a masculinist bias which is simplistic and an archaic presentation of male sexuality. Additionally, these lyrical expressions degrades women by presenting male frustrations with women rarely<sup>199</sup> going beyond what Merele Longwood calls "a concern with genital activity [in efforts to] deal with the difficulties men have sustaining intimacy, [expressing] men's love/hate feelings about machismo, [or discussing] sexual images in films and popular culture, sexuality in the workplace, men's violence toward women..."<sup>522</sup>

Many Black male Hip Hop artists including Jay-Z, Kanye West, and The Game take up some of these concerns (i.e. male attraction to pornography, fatherhood issues, intimacy issues, and ideas about vulnerability). However, the times these concerns are not discussed, far outnumber the times they are.

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<sup>522</sup> Longwood, "Male Sexuality," 363.

Rapper Rick Ross has many listeners upset for his shamefully misogynistic lyrics. As a guest on Rocko's Future – featuring "U.O.E.N.O" – He rapped:

Put molly in her champagne, she ain't even know it / I took her home and I enjoyed that,  
she ain't even know it.

In his verse Ross is saying he put a date rape drug called "molly" into a woman's drink, then took her home to have sex with her without her consent. Many activists have used a petition on Change.org, calling for Ross to apologize for advocating the rape of women.<sup>523</sup> But Ross contends in an interview that he doesn't used the word rape,<sup>524</sup> as if this excuses the reality of what his song narrative *is* saying and denying the far-reaching impact his lyrics and those of many other Hip Hop artists have in today's society. Ross's lyrical expressions are frequently focused on his sexual conquests of women. Through such lyrical content he asserts his masculinity by "normaliz[ing] the objectification, exploitation, [and] victimization of women,"<sup>525</sup> A twenty-two year old rapper name Sane produced a song entitled, "Not So Subtly Flexing" that gives an example of this victimization of women.

I got different types of girls it's a habit/Spread they legs they be laying on they back on  
the mattress/I'ma smash it/like baby why you talking Ima flaccid/why ya' gotta say you  
love me when we do it/That shit tragic/Oh so tragic/ like check my flow that shit is so  
immaculate/ Your girl she give me head/ but I ain't really talking that though/fact  
though/I want really speak if truth ain't got my back though.<sup>526</sup>

Sane's 2015 hit song lyrics are similar in lyrical content to the song by Rick Ross. Both

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<sup>523</sup> Chris Martins. "Rick Ross Explains He Didn't Rap About Rape Because, Well, He Didn't Say 'Rape'" <http://www.spin.com/2013/03/rick-ross-rape-lyrics-ecstasy-apology-video/> (March 2013) accessed December 28, 2015.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin, "Misogyny in Rap Music: A Content Analysis of Prevalence and Meanings," *Men and Masculinities* 12 (February 2009): 3-29.  
<http://www.hotnewhiphop.com/sane-notsosubtlyflexing-new-song.1967812.html> accessed December 2015.

<sup>526</sup> Sane's New Track "Not So Subtly Flexing."

songs focus solely on genital activity and women being sexual conquests, as Brandon Soderberg writes in his article criticizing Rick Ross's rape lyrics, In his "Is 'Yeezus' the Tipping Point for Rap Misogyny?" Soderberg describes how issues of female consent were ignored in the song. He writes,

Issues of consent in hip-hop party rap became too big to ignore earlier this year when Rick Ross rapped about "put[ting] molly" in a woman's drink and then having sex with her on Atlanta rapper Rocko's stoned street hit, "U.O.E.N.O." Here was someone quite literally making explicit what so much of the genre had been saying more carefully or in coded slang: Drugs and alcohol serve as a way to take advantage of women, all under the guise of having a good time.<sup>527</sup>

The lyricist's over-emphasis on the domination and objectification of women points to an obvious overcompensation of masculine performance. For example, the lyricist's lack of willingness to mention male challenges with intimacy, male vulnerability, and the inevitable male performance issues point<sup>528</sup> to a larger struggle within the heterosexual, Black male patriarchal model. This degradation of women speaks to the failure of society to attend to the issue of sexual intimacy as the complex matter it actually is. The critical listener of Hip Hop music is forced to question why lyricists focus solely on the physical act of sex instead of its emotional and relational components. These shallow expressions of the Black heterosexual male experience are a result of Aristotelian philosophical thought, which eventually infiltrated the Black Church doctrine and shaped the thinking of its followers; then, the larger Black community including the youth Hip Hop subculture, was inundated by the ideology of the oppression of outliers of heterosexual male expression. Although the historical context of homophobic lyrics are important, homophobia is not the only factor that informs them. Rap

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<sup>527</sup> Brandon Soderberg. "Is 'Yeezus' the Tipping Point for Rap Misogyny?" in SPIN June 2013. (accessed on December 2015) <http://www.spin.com/2013/06/yeezus-kanye-west-sexism-misogyny-rick-ross/>

<sup>528</sup> Longwood, "Male Sexuality", 363.

lyrics are equally informed by their social context. Becky Blanchard, author of “The Social Significance of Rap and Hip Hop Culture” writes, “[A Rapper’s] commentaries moved solely from a DJ’s skillz to their own personal experiences and stories.”<sup>529</sup>

**Do the narratives surrounding Black women’s bodies in Hip Hop have \*global\* and far-reaching implications for the cultures of violence and animus against women?**

Historically the treatment of Black women’s bodies have been taken on by minority women, human rights activist, scholars and lay people alike. Minority women are raising awareness about how Black women bodies are treated mainly because Black women are seen as savages non-human beings, and subjects to be gazed upon just as Europeans gazed on Sara Baartman, whose life was referred to earlier. In this section of the research paper, I argue that the narratives surrounding Black women’s bodies are part of the long history of patriarchal culture in which men have despised and oppressed women. Scholar, activist, author, and Professor Angela Y. Davis in *Women, Culture and Politics* addresses the history of gender discrimination and violence against women.<sup>530</sup> She points out that, rape and sexual assault are systemic practices that continue because of the larger culture of violence within which we live, in particular the violence against women that the patriarchal culture accepts, approves, and carries out. She writes:

We cannot grasp the true nature of sexual assault without situating it within a larger sociopolitical context. If we wish to comprehend the nature of sexual violence as it is experienced by women as individuals, we must be cognizant of its social mediations. These include the imperialistic violence imposed on the people of Nicaragua, the violence of South African apartheid, and the racist violence inflicted on Afro-Americans and other racially oppressed people here in the United States.

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<sup>529</sup> Becky Blanchard, “The Social Significance of Rap and Hip Hop Culture.” *Ethics of Development in a Global Environment*. [https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty\\_prejudice/mediarace/socialsignificance.htm](https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/mediarace/socialsignificance.htm) (accessed December 2014).

<sup>530</sup> Davis, *Women, Culture, and Politics*, 37.

Davis notes that the occurrence of HIV Aids is highest in Black female communities. Then there is the continual struggle of women for full equality and the affirmation the social changes that feminism has brought about for women. Davis points out that women who are raped are not regarded as the victim, but that rape is considered to be a victim-precipitated crime.<sup>531</sup> Davis challenges and debunks the pervasive myth that rape is only committed by Black men. Which begs the question for critical consumers of Hip Hop culture, what does this mean for Black women's bodies when Black women are largest consumers of the music? Although this is a very complex and layered subject, there are Black women every day who feel strongly that the portrayal of Black women's bodies in Hip Hop culture and the media is insulting to their humanity.

Commercialized rap music encourages promiscuity, and lyrics encouraging women to behave like objects. Images of African American women dominate current popular rap music videos. Ironically however, African American women have been regulated to a one-dimensional characterization that presents them as hypersexual jezebels. African American females as they are portrayed in Hip Hop music and culture gives Black women mixed feelings about themselves. Black women have an opportunity to evaluate the images of African American women in Hip Hop and rap music and respond by not purchasing the music. They can also choose to educate other women to do the same. However, while some women are horribly offended by the images, other women feel the depictions are not inaccurate. But Harrell's assertion, mentioned previously, reminds us of the sexually inappropriate ways in which Black male rappers have internalized a false sense of ownership of Black women's bodies. I will assert that, indeed it is true, that some Black women have also internalized the patriarchal sexist

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 40.

attitudes about their own bodies. They accept the image of the Black women as a hypersexual, sexually promiscuous, vixen who is by nature easily accessible and disposable.

Although this narrative did not originate with the Black male rapper, it has been internalized and perpetuated by him *and* his female counterparts. The result of Black men and Black women living in an environment of violent animus against Black women bodies for hundreds of years has caused many of them to internalize this view of women. The violent treatment against Black female bodies started before the Trans-Atlantic slave trade with Black female bodies like Sarah Baartman who was captured and placed on display by white Europeans who obtained sexual gratification from the public display of her genitals. Next, Black female daughters, mothers, wives, sisters, and friends were brutally raped, beaten, and traumatized during slavery on the plantation by white slave owners. Black female slaves were looked at as nonhuman and the narratives of violence against them are steeped in the stereotyped images to further otherize and ostracize their bodies. Post slavery, Black females bodies were rejected by Black male church authorities as Black males became implicit in advocating violence against Black women promoting abortion through spiritual manipulation. Denying Black women fair and equal access to ordination and rites of passage that males religious leaders receive in Black religious spaces has been another restriction Black male religious authorities have placed on Black women, further limiting their full participation in communal life. Lastly, it is important to note that the narrative concerning Black female sexual objectification that is found in Hip Hop music and Hip Hop culture can also be found in Black Church culture, although it is presented differently. I will point to one period where Hip Hop changed direction, moving away from oppressive attitudes toward Black women's bodies. However, the Black church worship experience continues to shame Black women's bodies. I argued the two tenets of Black church

worship described above shames the Black female body, and continues to shame Black female bodies in Black Church spaces. In conclusion, this paper concentrates primarily on Aristotle's influence on the Christian understanding of the female's place in society. Throughout this research I argue that Aristotle has had a great influence upon Christian theology that became both widespread and deeply embedded in Black Church doctrine which affected how women are treated today. Next, we will survey how the primary purveyors of sexism against Black women end to be Black males because of their alignment with white male patriarchy. This sexist oppression from Black males to Black women is most visible in Black Church leadership. In addition will we survey Aristotle's beliefs that infiltrated the church, leading to the practice of women being ruled by their male counterparts. The Aristotelian philosophy that the female and the slave have the same status placed women in a position that is still debated today because of the link between early Christianity and Aristotle. Aristotle reduced women's roles in society, and promoted the idea that women are less than men. Then we will survey the historical antecedents that have encouraged Black males to perform in hyper-masculine ways toward women, paying specific attention to behavior as enacted in Hip Hop music. The focus of this section of the study is the oppression that Black women have experienced at the hands of Black males, as well as that historically experienced at the hands of white males who held power over the Black enslaved population. Next, I survey the Black community and how the congregational leadership is at the root of the prevalent silence in the Black church concerning the discourse around sex and intimacy. There emerges a prevailing belief that sexuality or the erotic is bad, dirty, and negative; it is this pervasive thought that makes breaching topics of Black sexuality in African American pulpits off limits. Hip Hop music becomes an alternative to Black Church spaces when creating discussions about love, sexuality, Hip Hop music fills the void that the silence of the Black

Church creates concerning sexuality. Hip Hop became a response to coming-of-age topics that Black urban youth consider. White Hodge writes about how Hip Hop culture provides a place of identity where Black religious organizations abandoned youth. Hip Hop opened dialogue for some circumstances but stood alongside older, oppressive ideas embraced by historical majorities (white church culture and later Black church culture). For example, pushing heteronormative models and excluding and marginalizing those who deviate in expression of gender and sexual expression. Popular Hip Hop artists like Too Short, Dr. Dre, 50 Cent, and Snoop Dogg began to embrace the disrespect of women. Some people argue that Snoop's famous line "Bitches ain't shit, but hoes and tricks," and Too Short's song "Gangstas and Strippers" are lyrics that are so misogynistic and degrading that academicians should not even engage in scholarly debates about the lyrical content because they are devoid of any intellectual value. Conversely, I argue that since music has the power to affect the emotions and therefore the lives of the listeners, in this case young African American males, Hip Hop music demands both a scholarly and doctrinal response. The Black urban youth subculture that uplifted many poverty-stricken Black youth became a culture that promotes the idea that being a pimp and to objectify a woman is cool. This needs to be rectified. Since Hip Hop music is an omnipresent backdrop to the lives African American male youth and a powerful force in their lives, then scholars should give youth resources to analyze what they hear in the music. Because Hip Hop started out as a creative art form combating oppressive forces, a scholarly response can help youth critique the sexualized and commercialized power of the lyrics. In her article, "Black Theology and the Black Women," Jacquelyn Grant, African American feminist, systematic theologian and minister, writes that Blacks progressed from the slave culture where women and male slaves both had "equality in their inequality." Grant writes that both Black men and Black



women in the slave community were demeaned as “sharing the characteristics of ‘emotionality and irrationality.’” Grant discusses how the schism between Black men and Black women deepened as Black men sought to empower themselves by embracing White male-dominated society. The standards they embraced further perpetuated Western Eurocentric standards of “beauty” and “ugliness.”

I outline three practical steps that Black church leaders might take to help enable African American males to find joy surrounding the sexualization of Black women’s bodies.

the ordination of more women in Black mainline church denominations.

The adoption and inclusion of Evelyn Parker’s chapter on sanctified rage found in *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*.

The affirmation of African American youth with queer identities utilizing the critique of Hip Hop music and culture.

Women who speak out against hyper-sexism have been marginalized within society and the mainstream music industry. These women are perceived as ugly, aggressive, loud, and annoying if they speak out and if they are not sexually available. But even if women were to speak out against hyper-sexism, rappers would continue to invent these “bitches and hoes” within lyrics. Then there are Black women who feel as if these violent lyrics are harmless and rappers or Hip Hop artists are perceived as pimps and players a majority of the time, and without women servicing to them, they will not have that status. Hip Hop has evolved so much over the years that women are perceived as the ones being dominated and the men are dominating over them. In order to change this perspective, women should be in charge of their own sexual imagery and hold the freedom to express themselves as they see fit. There are many factors including internalized racism, patriarchy, sexism, history, class and respectability politics that

influence the reasons why both Black males and Black females engage the hypersexual politics that surround Black bodies in the media, specifically Hip Hop music. Additionally, the refusal to voice sexuality in Black places of worship doesn't contribute to discourse around being healthy sexual beings.

We have learned the importance of transmission of African roots and traditions to the youth in Black churches. Black Christian faith can be translated through the wisdom traditions of Blacks including the spirituals—and much of how the wisdom of the Black church can be incorporated into Christian education. Black religious' educators should use these pedagogical perspectives to assist Black youth find wisdom for their sojourn.

Despite sexist attitudes and actions that attempted to discourage female participation, women graffiti writers continued to visit train yards and decorate their turf with bright pink colored paints, and cartoon characters, in efforts to express female individuality and unique styles through this mode of social protest.<sup>532</sup>

Another element of Hip--Hop culture is breakdancing. This is a dancing style that is characterized as “competitive, acrobatic and pantomimic dance with outrageous physical contortions, spins and backflips [which are] wedded to a fluid syncopated circling body rock.”<sup>533</sup> The name breakdancing is said to emerge from dancers using disco music to focus on break points in the music and DJ's rap mixes.<sup>534</sup>

Breakdancing has evolved into Hip--Hop artist creating breakdancing routines, dancers gathering into circular formations, footwork routines were added, and freezing, or holding moves

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

longer.<sup>535</sup> According to Tricia Rose, female bodies were unable to perform some of the dances with ease, but many excelled with dances such the head-spin, and hand -glides. Women who could perform these break dances were rejected as being “unfeminine” and given a reputation as being “sexually available.”<sup>536</sup> This sexist behavior is widespread in the breakdancing communities, however, Rose notes that two breakers that she interviewed did not have a problem with female breakdancing, only feared for their safety.<sup>537</sup> The final element of Hip--Hop culture that will be analyzed for its historical treatment of women is Rap music. Rap music is the element of Hip Hop music that I mainly focus on in my ethnographic research. I would like to analyze this element of Hip Hop as it relates to spiritual resilience and political resistance as it relates to combating hyper-pathologization of African American youth males. This research begins with how their mothers are pathologized and the transmission of their wisdom to their sons.

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<sup>535</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 47.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 49

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### BLACK BODIES ARE THE SACRED SPACE: BLACK BODIES AS THE METHODOLOGY

Hip Hop music is a sacred text which provides young black males a tool for spiritual resilience, and political resistance against hyper-pathologization, criminalization and denigration of their physical bodies. This phenomenon of spiritual resilience and political resistance is taught and transmitted to black youth primarily through black women religious educators, who provide them with experiences that disrupt the negative images that have already shaped their consciousness.<sup>538</sup> They do this by sharing with them the cultural wisdom of Holy Writ (Qur'anic text and Biblical text), through oral recitation and prayer. Hip Hop has roots in the Black oral tradition, the Black prophetic tradition, and Black sonic tradition, important elements that - are intimately related to the expression and creative art of Hip Hop.

Hip Hop music is a coded language that describes the complex realities and struggles of black youths who daily face violence that places them in close proximity to social death. The Hip Hop language is oftentimes pessimistic, dangerous, gritty, insulting and vulgar, but Rebollo-Gil and Moras remind us that the “alleged moral depravity of the artist or the wantonness of the so-called Black Ghetto culture [and language] shouldn’t be seen as such, [but] rather as a critical

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<sup>538</sup>Disruptive consciousness\* is a term that was discussed with me while conversing with Associate Professor of African American Studies & Gender and Sexuality Studies, Dr. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard about the interactions between the black mothers in the religious communities I researched alongside, and their sons. We decided this term best described the phenomenon

and necessary discussion of patriarchy and violence.”<sup>539</sup> The violence in Hip Hop music and its subculture should not be silenced and dismissed by religious educators, but although challenged it must be understood as a reflection of how life is actually experienced by African American youths. This is exactly what many Black female religious educators are doing. Hip Hop has become a permanent part of the culture even while we continue to wrestle with what some strongly believe to be the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular aspects of the culture.

A combination of social apathy and laser focused terrorism against blackness has led to social death and nihilism for far too many young blacks. Hip Hop music is a coded language that provides a therapeutic cloak of resilience enabling them to deal with the physical and psychological trauma they suffer every day. The rhythmic beats, syncopation, recitation, inflection, flow, and the subversive, vulgar, nihilistic, and misogynistic language offer them reprieve from the reality of social death. Instead of critiquing lyrics as a problem, educators are in a position to complement the commentary of rap lyrics, encouraging and leading critical discussions that acknowledge black social realities, because they understand that hard core rap lyrics are not created in a societal vacuum. In an interview, well-known rapper “Pusha T” spoke about Legendary New York rapper “Big Poppa” Wallace being the greatest artist of all times.<sup>540</sup> Big Poppa suffered poverty and violence as a young Black male living in public housing. Big Poppa was gifted at storytelling; he shared stories of his own difficult past in a way that allowed his audience to relate to his journey of growing up young, Black and poor. In the interview, Pusha T said: “You know, [Biggie] was speakin’ to the streets..[he] just spoke to all of those

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<sup>539</sup> Guillermo Rebollo-Gil and Amanda Moras, “Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music: Misogyny, Violence and the Negotiation of (White-Owned) Space.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 118–32 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00898.x>.

<sup>540</sup> Pitchfork. Pusha T’s Favorite Verse: Notorious B.I.G. on “Young G’s” VERSES. Accessed February 18, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wn7aHYByE38>.

street nuances that resonated throughout the town...” Big Poppa’s storytelling addressed real political and societal problems like police brutality and extreme poverty, both of which existed then and now as a daily part of black inner-city life. Similarly, Daniel White Hodge<sup>541542</sup> reminds us that, as Public Enemy rapper Chuck D contends, Rap music is the CNN for youth.

Amanda Moras and Guillermo Rebollo-Gil have jointly written an article that puts out an invitation for discussions concerning misogyny, patriarchy, and violence.<sup>543</sup> This present study urges black religious educators and lay people alike to continue discussions in their religious communities, discussions that insist on alternatives to systemic racism, homophobia, and corporate capitalism. These ills must be addressed because they contribute every day to the social death of black youth.

### What is Social Death?

Death is an inevitable life occurrence; at some point, all human beings will depart from this life. However, social death is a concept used to describe how human beings are treated while they are still alive. Social death occurs when persons are treated as if they are non-existent in society through methods of isolation that allow the person to be treated as if they are “something other than human and no longer a person.”<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Pitchfork. Pusha T’s Favorite Verse: Notorious B.I.G. on “Young G’s” | VERSES. Accessed February 18, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wn7aHYByE38>.

<sup>542</sup> Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs, and a Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010). Dr. White Hodge, Assistant Professor of Youth Ministry at North Park, is a Religion and Culture scholar.

<sup>543</sup> Amanda Moras and Rebollo-Gill, “Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music: Misogyny, Violence and the Negotiation of (White-Owned) Space” in *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2012: 118-132, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00898.x>

<sup>544</sup> E. Borgstrom, “Social Death”, *QIM, an International Journal of Medicine*, 2017: 5-7. E. Borgstrom is on the Faculty at the Wellbeing, Education and Languages, School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, at Open University, who works with the concept of social death.

E. Borgstrom and his colleagues at Open University describe the concept of social death from a healthcare perspective. They see it in clinical settings where dementia patients are isolated from their family systems, and then are treated without any sense of human agency. They point out that during discussions of care policies and procedures related to the patients' well-being, healthcare professionals frequently act as if the patient is not present. They argue that such treatment of patients with dementia oftentimes equates to a denial of patient rights. Borgstrom recalls the three elements of social death named by Jana Králová. She writes, "These are: a loss of social identity; a loss of social connectedness; and losses associated with disintegration of the body."<sup>545</sup> For Borgstrom, the definition of social death includes all individuals who are not accepted as fully human by the wider society. However, the observations and analyses by Borgstrom and his colleagues are mere expansions of a reality first studied by Orlando Patterson. Patterson's scholarship explores in great depth the reality of slavery in sixty-six societies and the complex realities of the death-dealing elements of the social interactions between the master and the slave. Patterson delves into developing societies including Greece, Rome, China, Korea, Islamic Kingdoms, Africa, the Caribbean, and the American South. Patterson's research later called for educators in various fields of study, like Borgstrom and his colleagues in healthcare, to explore diverse systems in light of Patterson's concept of social death in efforts to discover the extent of the phenomenon. Similar to Patterson's examination of the system of slavery and how it strips away the dignity of humans, while it forces them to endure violent domination and the isolation of people from their places of origin, educators analyzed social systems that effectively mimic the institution of slavery. It is important to note that the focal point of Patterson's research is not the physical enslavement of the body. He is

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<sup>545</sup> Jana Králová "What Is Social Death?" *Contemporary Social Science* 10. no. 3 (2015): 235-48, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080.21582041.2015.1114407>

more concerned with the psychological trauma, sociological indoctrination and their theoretical consequences that cause a slave to be socially dead.

### **Black Women as Religious Educators in Black Communities**

Black youth are inundated with the savagery and barbarity of a hostile, racist, patriarchal, sexist society every minute of their existence in America.<sup>546 547 548 549 550 551</sup> As bearers of African religious culture and makers of social change,<sup>552 553</sup> I submit that it is primarily the black mothers in religious spaces teaching black youth spiritual and cultural wisdom as a survival skill that will provide these young people with the spiritual resilience necessary to outsmart hatred in society. In addition to their mothers' spiritual and cultural teachings, Hip Hop pedagogy has become an important and sacred text companion of many black male youths. It is the combination of Hip Hop lyrics and beats and the spiritual wisdom they have absorbed from their

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<sup>546</sup> Jayme S. Ganey, "Ref Who Had His A\*\* Kicked for Being Racist Before, Forces a Black Teen's Dreadlocks To Be Cut in Front of A Wrestling Auditorium Crowd," *DiversityInc*, December 21, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/white-racist-ref-forces-cutting-of-dreadlocks-of-black-high-school-wrestler>.

<sup>547</sup> Keka Araujo, "Yukai Yang Tried to Slowly Kill His Black College Roommate," *DiversityInc*, December 21, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/yukai-yang-tried-to-kill-roommate>.

<sup>548</sup> "Black Man Put in Handcuffs After Bank Calls 911 Because They Thought His Paycheck Was Too Much," *BlackNews.com*, December 19, 2018, <http://www.blacknews.com/news/paul-mccowns-black-man-arrested-bank-calls-911-thought-paycheck-too-much/>.

<sup>549</sup> "Police Body Slam 14-Year Old Black Student for Stealing a Candy Bar From a Vending Machine," *BlackNews.com*, December 19, 2018, <http://www.blacknews.com/news/police-bodyslam-14-year-old-black-student-asah-glenn-stealing-candy-bar-vending-machine/>.

<sup>550</sup> Keka Araujo, "Rapper Meek Mill's Grandmother's Home Vandalized With Racist Message," *DiversityInc*, December 19, 2018, <https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/meek-mills-grandmothers-house-vandalized>.

<sup>551</sup> Jayme S. Ganey, "Southington High School Student's Racist Video Investigated," *DiversityInc*, accessed December 23, 2018, [https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/southington-schools-student-racist-video?utm\\_source=WhatCounts&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=wc-ip%201214](https://www.diversityinc.com/Haters/southington-schools-student-racist-video?utm_source=WhatCounts&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=wc-ip%201214).

<sup>552</sup> Nah Dove, *Afrikan Mothers: Bearers of Culture, Makers of Social Change* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

<sup>553</sup> Riché J. Daniel Barnes, *Raising the Race: Black Career Women Redefine Marriage, Motherhood, and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).



Black mothers and the women in their religious communities, as well as the spiritual values learned from their primary religious texts (the Qur'an and Bible) that provides young Black youths with the critical tools needed to combat social death and nihilism.

Králová argues that these destructive elements that are present in social experiences result in loss of human agency, loss of identity, and loss of social connectedness. The Black male religious youths written about in this study have all had experiences of people regarding them as something other than human, or no longer a person, non-existent, socially dead. In efforts to navigate trauma and pain experienced in their local communities, to endure hateful treatment at schools by educators, and to bear with the abuse dealt them by local government officials, these youths explain how listening to Hip Hop music, with its beat and rhymes assists them in redirecting their anger and strategically focusing their thoughts in order to calmly address their aggressors.

It requires heroic effort for young Black males to remain sane and calm while handling violent situations that include but are certainly not limited to being racially profiled, battered by police officers in their own neighborhoods, targeted for exclusion by the educators who are supposed to protect them, and, last but not least, hyper-pathologized by media outlets that continue to reinforce stereotypes and tropes about black males. Can mosque/church leaders help members to endure and process this suffering and injustice? Can mosques/churches help members to hold (physically hold) and transform suffering and bodily trauma? Hip Hop through rhythmic movement actively helps the black body hold the pain, then release the pain through dance, and use movement to step away from the pain. The religious ecstatic experience does the same, as do experiences of prayer (prayer prostration in both Black Muslim and Black Christian gatherings), body movements of the choir, shouting praise by the Black Christian congregation.

While visiting a mosque, I engaged in the call to prayer and witnessed the repetitive motion of the young black youth and the black mothers alike that in my mind reflected the rhythmic motions and mimicked the rocking and the engagement of bodies in time with the beat of Hip Hop.

### **Hip Hop Is a Tool for Teaching Spiritual Resilience**

Scholars who have described Hip Hop as a tool for teaching resilience include Daniel White Hodge, Monica Miller, Tricia Rose, Chris Tinson and Mc Robin, and Ralph Watkins. The Webster Dictionary defines resilience as “the ability of a substance to be pliant, flexible, and have the ability to bounce back after being stretched.”<sup>554</sup> Resilience scholars written about in this research record resilience as the ability for a person to cope with traumatic events, like violence, incarceration, death, lost. As a practical theologian, spiritual resilience is being defined here by Carrie Doehring the Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Iliff School of Theology in Denver because of her researcher on spiritual trauma. In her book *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern A Post Modern Approach* Doering writes of resilience as the soul’s ability to bounce back from suffering. Doehring writes, “How is the care seeker coping through a crisis?”<sup>555</sup> Is the person seeking care able to disengage from the crisis in efforts to [realize that] the web of life is intertwined with the web of evil.”<sup>556</sup> I would like to ground my definition of spiritual resilience by surveying the theological concept “soul care” found in Carrie Doehring’s book where Doehring writes of the transformational healing process the soul has to go through or after traumatic circumstances (i.e. terminal illness of a love one, survival of gang/police

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<sup>554</sup> *The Webster Dictionary*, “resilience,” “Definition of RESILIENCE.” Accessed February 19, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>.

<sup>555</sup> Doehring, Carrie. *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*. 1 edition. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 127, 11, 65, 88.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

violence, ect.) The transformational process the soul and (this research adds the Black body) enters during and after trauma. The web of connection that one has, familial systems the caregivers, one acquires all will determine the person's ability to bounce back. The strategies of practicing goodness to oneself and others after trauma is also a way to determine resilience.

I learned that there are a multiplicity of factors and web of networks that are utilized in the "soul care" of African American male youth to make them resilient. African Americans are a resilient people in general which I suggest repeatedly suggest in my dissertation is directly related to a plethora of spiritual leanings. Practices of Islam, Christian practices, and different types of Black Music including, but not limited Hip Hop music.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines resilience as the substance that has the ability to repair itself.<sup>557</sup> Scholars of education (Masten, Gramerzy, Rutler, Wolin, and Bronfenner) write about resilience in school age children. Many theories have resulted from their research. It is important to note that although some of these scholars have worked since the 1970s in education, psychology, spirituality, business, medicine, and engineering, they have yet to arrive at one definition of the term resilience. Some scholars argue that resilience is innate; still others argue against this theory because they claim resilience is constantly a shifting process in environments that change. Many children can be resilient in some situations, but unable to cope with trauma in others. For example, the **Resiliency Theory or (RT)**<sup>558 559 560 561</sup> – refers to the

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<sup>557</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing. Entry: Resilience." Accessed February 19, 2019. <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=resilience+>.

<sup>558</sup> Marc A. Zimmerman. "Resiliency Theory: A Strengths-Based Approach to Research and Practice for Adolescent Health." *Health Education & Behavior: The Official Publication of the Society for Public Health Education* 40, no. 4 (August 2013): 381–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198113493782>.

<sup>559</sup> Adrian Van Breda, "A Critical Review of Resilience Theory and Its Relevance for Social Work." *Social Work* 54, no. 1 (April 2018). <https://doi.org/10.15270/54-1-611>.

<sup>560</sup> "UCLA Campus and Student Resilience" *Bruin Resilience*. Accessed February 19, 2019. <https://www.resilience.ucla.edu/resilience/bruin-resilience>.

ability of a person to cope under stressful situations and traumatic events. Despite damaging events they have experienced, many traumatized children become healthy functional persons, even able to build relationships with peers, classmates, and teachers. However, the scholars conclude that it is the social development a school age child attains by age four that determines each individual's level of resilience

- 1) **Social Competency** – How well can a child build relationships and connect with classmates, navigate social skills, become bicultural in social situations that call for those skills?
- 2) **Autonomy** – Does the child have a sense of independence? Does she self-differentiate when necessary? Does she have control over her ability to make peer relationships and build trusting and healthy relationships with teachers?
- 3) Is the child able to build personal goals?
- 4) Does the child have a positive outlook about the future?

McLoyd, Hill, and A. Dodge editors of *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity* have also identified **Ecological Theories** that impact resilience in African American young children,<sup>562</sup> specifically naming environmental factors that include their culture, their neighborhood exposures, their individual family systems and how they interact. Policy writers suggest in, “Resilience in African American Children and Adolescents,”<sup>563</sup> that more ecologically sensitive resilience models are being produced by more contemporary studies, which include challenges that African American populations encounter. These include the kind of tangible cultural experiences that are not existent in other communities, but that make a notable difference in the functionality and socialization of African American youth resilience is

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<sup>561</sup> Gloria Patricia Montgomery-Walters, “Resilience and African American Early Adolescents: The Protective Function of Religion and Structured After-School Activities,” [https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1095&context=luc\\_diss](https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1095&context=luc_diss) n.d., 99.

<sup>562</sup> Vonnie C. McLoyd, Nancy E. Hill, and Kenneth A. Dodge, eds. *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity*. 1 edition. (New York; London: The Guilford Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>563</sup> Michael Ungar and Linda Liebenberg, “Resilience in African American Children and Adolescents: A Vision for Optimal Development: (582242010-001).” *American Psychological Association*, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e582242010-001>.

established and cultivated, the ecological factors that must be examined are the plentiful health disparities amongst African Americans: asthma, obesity and lack of access to proper healthcare.<sup>564</sup> This report clearly identifies environmental racism that can be seen in the many landfills located in close proximity to African American neighborhoods.<sup>565</sup> These stressors, traumas, and disruptions in the lives and insults to the dignity of children are forced on them even before they are impacted by the systemic indignities of sub-par education, immigration challenges, racism, bullying by peers and their teachers.

Many schools and colleges reject Pauline Lipman's neo-liberal theory of education, but those schools will have to create spaces that encourage critical inquiry and the critique of the state in ways similar to Hip Hop's critical pedagogy that work against the teacher in urban educational settings. The educator needs to know 1) Some administrators will not be adequately trained or skilled to assist you as a teacher. 2) The abilities and skills of the teachers will always be tied to the testing performance of students on standardized tests. Weiner, a wise veteran of the New Jersey urban teaching landscape, points out the need of teachers to always be reflective and to know that the journey will be one of working alongside systemic authorities who will undercut what you set out to accomplish. She does not have a solution to the educational pitfalls. Therefore, a new teacher in an urban setting should be clear about the challenging road ahead.

In their work, "Hip Hop, Critical Pedagogy, and Radical Education in a Time of Crisis," Chris Tinsen and Carlos McBride tell how Hip Hop teaches resilience. In his work, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs, and a Cultural Theology* (2010), Daniel White Hodge lists ten important life elements taught through Hip Hop: 1) Culture, 2) Entrepreneurship, 3) Fashion, 4) B-boy and

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

B-Girls, 5) Knowledge of Self, 6) Knowledge of God, 7) Dee Jay-ing, 8) Emceeing, 9) Graffiti Writing, 10) Rapping, 11) Breaking or Breakdancing. Of the ten, the fifth element, Knowledge, is defined as the pursuit of all wisdom and information that pertains to the liberation of the oppressed.

Tinsen and McBride insist it is important for Hip Hop scholars to be involved in activism against the repeated injustices perpetrated by police officers and those in position of authority who continue to justify attacks on black bodies. Tinsen and McBride maintain that Hip Hop culture contains critical pedagogical methods in its DNA. I agree that Hip Hop's historical roots, its narratives, and its rap songs teach youth to be resilient. Henry Louis Gates Jr. strongly maintains that Black Literature already has a "literary canon" and that "literary theories" are already within its narrative.<sup>566</sup> He points out that Western Europeans in their racist academic modes of studying literature do not have a monopoly on literary inventions or creations, and insists, therefore, that Black literature theory can and must be evaluated on its own terms.

Youth who utilize Hip Hop culture as critical pedagogy for resistance are taught to use it as a protective tool in environments where they find themselves at risk when confronted by police or authority figures that mean to harm them. Movements such as Black Lives Matter, Black August, and the many rallies, letter-writing campaigns, and nonviolent protests demanding the freedom of political prisoner Assata Shakur are all tools that teach youth to how to practice resilience.

Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, in their book, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, call on the impoverished and the oppressed of Brazil to "read the world," when their freedom is threatened. In a similar message, Tinsen and McBride have pointed out how Hip Hop

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<sup>566</sup> Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, xiv.

culture has been under prolonged attack by police electoral debates, immigration, educational cuts, and civil rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and mass incarceration. But, they argue, Hip Hop's history, and its critical edge of inquiry embedded within itself, teaches youth communal resilience by constantly "reading the world."

Tinsen and McBride also challenge Hip Hop scholars, Hip Hop activists, and Hip Hop organizers to use critical pedagogical tools of resistance taught by Hip Hop in the face of rampant capitalist consumerism. For example, they recognize that those who consume and produce the products for Hip Hop culture are Latinx and African Americans, who are the pioneers of the Hip Hop culture. However, the ownership and stakeholders of the products and services of the large corporations behind the products are largely white males. They argue that if the largest owners of Hip Hop's music, clothing lines, and sponsoring corporations are white males, then Hip Hop scholars, and activists, and artists should seriously question the Hip Hop movement is transnational. Tinsen and McBride argue for communal resilience when it comes to preventing, as much as possible, outsiders from appropriating Hip Hop cultural ideas and getting wealthy doing so. They teach resilience when they call to remembrance the elements of Hip Hop that White Hodge notes as entrepreneurialship and financial health. There are many minority-owned record stores, radio stations, fashion lines, and vendors for Hip Hop concerts. The ideology of buying locally is a tool of resilience against consumerism, and capitalist oppression.

There are gender, sexuality, race, and class constructions that scholars Daniel White Hodge, Monica Miller, Tricia Rose, and Ralph Watkins argue are a vital part of Hip Hop's critical pedagogy of resistance and resilience.

Rose begins her work *Black Noise: Rap Music in Contemporary America* (1994) about the intersection between lack and desire, and how many of the neighboring Black and Puerto

Rican residents in South Bronx, New York in the 1970's, created technologies to survive the multilayered oppressions they faced. She points out that the New York School system was under resourced and delivered sub-par education. Art and music programs were cut, and jobs were unavailable for high school graduates.

Rose tells narratives of Hip Hop artists and how they acquired skills to make a living. Salt and Pepa (female rap artists) worked as telephone receptionists for Sears and used their vocal skills and intellectual capacities to launch a rap group. One interviewee recounted to Rose his ability to dance and how he and his group used some plywood, board, and random equipment to make a dance floor. Rose calls attention to the ingenious inventions of Hip Hoppers in the face of the lack of green space and recreation centers; their inventions were creative technologies. They charged guests to watch them breakdance. This was how Hip Hop artists capitalized on their skill sets. Graffiti writers were artists who didn't have space in a traditional classroom to display their artwork, so they designed murals on the walls of subway trains and buildings and had graffiti battles. Rose describes Black-majority neighborhoods that were saturated with poverty, gang violence, police brutality, drugs, and socioeconomic disparities. Pioneers of the Hip Hop Movement used garbage cans, old wires, wood boxes, and their own mouths, to construct their realities as a form of resisting oppression. Rose explains these "creative technologies" as tools of resilience that Hip Hop artists have used to survive and protect themselves from greater risk.

Female graffiti artists and others in the Hip Hop community had to develop strategies of resilience because sexism was rampant. Women worked extra hard to protect their sexual reputations, because the male artists would try to discredit their work. Therefore, female artists had to secretly travel to the train yards to post their art, at dangerous times. Additionally, female



graffiti artists, writes Rose, were victims of sexual abuse, and always in danger of family retaliation because male artists didn't want the female artists to be more successful than they were. Another layer of sexism and gender discrimination that Rose exposes was in familial structures. Many female rappers desired to be mentored by male uncles and by fathers who owned deejaying equipment; but instead they encountered discrimination. The young aspiring female emcees were told to go play with dolls. Female artists were pigeonholed by male family members into stereotypical female roles that society had fixed as natural for women. Rose argues that there should be more female emcees creating spaces for females who want to be trained musically. Rose's challenge to the females in Hip Hop teaches us the critical pedagogical tools of resilience while resisting sexist oppression in male-dominated spaces in Hip Hop. Females continue to build coalitions inside the male dominated entertainment industry of Hip Hop.

Monica R. Miller writes a chapter in, *Ain't I a Womanist, Too?* (2013) entitled, "I Am a Nappy-Headed Ho,"<sup>567</sup> where she delivers a scathing critique of Don Imus (and the patriarchal white-dominated power structure that inspires him.). Don Imus, recently retired sports announcer, has used his position as a white male NBA entertainer to slander, and publicly shame, a black female professional athlete and degrade her personhood by calling her a "nappy-headed ho." Miller offers a womanist, humanist critique of this public spectacle. Her critique is also inherently a form of critical pedagogical resistance to misogyny in the black hyper-masculine male-dominated Hip Hop entertainment industry. Simultaneously, Miller provides discerning assessments of white male privilege by analyzing Don Imus's words and the implications, from a global perspective, of his words for black women and the assault on black female bodies. The narrative of a white, privileged man publicly shaming a Black, female professional about her

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<sup>567</sup> Monica A. Coleman, *Ain't I a Womanist, Too? Third-Wave Womanist Religious Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 126–127.

coarse, kinky hair in its natural state, has ramifications for the historical narrative of whites once again uplifting European standards of beauty over black features and attempting to control black bodies. This is a toxic narrative that black women and minority women are subjected to in the media and society. However, Miller provides critical tools for resisting this blatant form of oppression. Miller's scholarly work provides resilience for black women first by teaching readers the root of the historical narrative, and second by providing black women with Hip Hop critical tools to subvert this narrative by saying "My Black Is Beautiful."

Tinson and McBride argue that we live in a world where anxious employers are seeking specific skill sets that must be transferable, and these skills are in high demand. In an unstable job market where workers are not being paid a living wage, it is time for Hip Hop to be taught in traditional academic spaces. Hip Hop as a traditional educational curriculum will be met with resistance by the majority of white men in the academy who hold positions of power. This situation is already being addressed by Anthony Pinn. Pinn allows Hip Hop artists Bum B and David Banner to teach Hip Hop in his classes at Rice University. David White Hodge taught at Pasadena Community College alongside KRS One, one of the founders of Hip Hop who is a scholar and activist. Dr. Ralph Watkins who teaches at Columbia Seminary infuses his lectures with teaching critical pedagogical methods like resisting stereotypical narratives about Blacks in the media and utilizing research to bring forth ground-breaking text on Hip Hop and the Black Church's involvement. And Dr. Monica Miller convenes groups of seminary educators to discuss Hip Hop and its trajectory across the academy, media, and society.

The above-mentioned Hip Hop scholars teach millennials, activists, organizers, artists, and urban teachers how to be resilient using Hip Hop pedagogy when met with structural oppression from within educational, societal, religious, and financial institutions. Some argue

that Hip Hop should not be taught as a form of education, but education is precisely what it is. The teleological ramifications of education are that people must have knowledge if they are to liberate their society from poverty and injustice. Hip Hop is unique in the sense that, similar to Gates' argument about Black literature, Hip Hop has all forms of embedded theories and genres that are available for the teacher to use. First, Hip Hop has historical theories embedded in its pedagogy. Hip Hop has in its archives the historical narratives containing the oppression of Black people in America's foundation. Hip Hop contains within it the Black experience of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Jim Crow Laws, segregation, lynching, voter suppression, protests, sit-ins and the entire Civil Rights Movement, and now it contains the struggles of oppression during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement. Hip Hop has a technological element where critical inquiry examines the police brutality shown on videos on social media, which can be readily accessed as BLM protesters continue to interrogate the state via social media. Hip Hop's historical narrative also brings in the life experiences of African American co-founders Latin@'s and their narratives. Next, Hip Hop has at its disposal an endless vault of Rap songs documenting individual and communal protest and suffering. Hip Hop culture includes poetry and graffiti writing which tell stories of social protest. Finally we have our greatest Hip Hop assets to date, the Black and Brown bodies of b-girls, and b-boys, who place their physical bodies on the line for liberation and freedom on the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>568</sup> These Black and Brown bodies are fighting for their neighborhoods, their communities, and their families. Hip Hoppers are the "canon"; they are the "living breathing documents." Their experiences are enmeshed in Hip Hop culture, and their bodies are the evidence of their survival

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<sup>568</sup> The Editors, "Religion, Secularism, and Black Lives Matter."

and resilient spirits. They dance, they rap, they cry, they “crump”, they “crip walk”, they “Nae Nae,” all for freedom and liberation from the suffering of being black in America.

My research will show how Hip Hop has allowed me to become my holistic self, in addition to teaching me confidence and resilience. This research project will show how practitioners and scholars can develop a holistic self, as well as understand how Hip Hop music and culture cultivates resilience in more nuanced ways. This study will highlight several scholars I have named above, and will include many more in an effort to incorporate and teach a philosophy that is critical of the unquestioning promotion of consumerism by media, capitalism, and harmful social norms. I will use Hip Hop as a critical pedagogy to make visible ideas about race, gender, and religion that are presented negatively by those in the dominant group who therefore expect their slanted ideas to be accepted as authoritative and fixed. The demeaning narratives that are reproduced relentlessly about subordinate groups will be exposed for their falseness and cruelty. Finally, I will incorporate my scholarship into my praxis by working to empower diverse faith communities. Hip Hop will be presented as promoting a critical pedagogy that aids oppressed people to resist the dominant class. My message will insist that to dismiss Hip Hop, to fail to see it as an important cultural asset and a lens for critical inquiry will not serve the academy or the world around us.

### **Black Motherhood: the Transmission of Culture as Tool of Spiritual Resilience**

In her chapter entitled, “Surrogacy and Survival,” in Karen Teel’s *Racism and the Image of God*,<sup>569</sup> Delores S. Williams writes about Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her divinely orchestrated birthing process. In Williams’ analysis something happens to the physical bodies of both Mother and Son during this divine birthing process. Williams surmises that, initially, the Spirit of God mounts Mary, and then a transference occurs allowing the power of God’s Spirit, which was given to Mary from God, to be actively poured onto Jesus. Mary is identified by Williams as the first container of God’s power. Additionally, as Mary’s womb acts as the container and carrier used to transport God’s spiritual power, Jesus in turn receives this power, and Jesus pours out the power He has received through His Mother and gives this gift to creation. Through this process of divine reproduction Jesus’ mother Mary transfers not only God’s Spirit, but creativity. I maintain, therefore, that every mother has God’s Spirit and the potential inside of her to create and transmit; thus she transmits culture and creativity through her womb and her words.

Delores Williams describes how enslaved Black women experienced God in the “uncultivated” spaces on the plantation, mainly in the wilderness. Williams suggests the physical location is important to a person who is enslaved because a person whose body is bound by chattel slavery is unable to experience any sense of physical freedom. Her physical body was always at the disposal of her master, her mistress,<sup>570</sup> and other children and relatives on the plantation.<sup>571</sup> Williams argues that once the enslaved person escaped into the wilderness, she connected to God’s Spirit both in her black body and in her spirit. While discussing Black

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<sup>569</sup> Teel, *Racism and the Image of God*, 92-94.

<sup>570</sup> Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 18.

<sup>571</sup> Saidiya Hartman, “The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors,” *Souls* 18, no. 1 (March 14, 2016): 166–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2016.1162596>.

motherhood as imaging God, Williams' notes that female slaves found opportunities to escape into the wilderness where slave masters had no power over them. Once she arrived amongst the trees and natural elements, she was free to dance, sing, and cry.<sup>572</sup> Therefore, Williams cautions the reader to understand the wilderness *not* as a dreadful place which needs to be tamed or feared. She considers this traditional Eurocentric definition of the wilderness unfitting.<sup>573</sup> Conversely, Williams provides a womanist re-interpretation of the wilderness as a physical locale different from a place that needs cultivation. Additionally, to the Black female slave, the body is extremely important as a source of spiritual wisdom. Williams' notes how, after slavery, the concept of the wilderness in African American religious thought shifted its meaning. Some began to categorize the wilderness as a social, economic, or political situation. However, during slavery, black women could find refuge in the wilderness. In this sense, the wilderness *was* a place of freedom from oppression during slavery. Additionally, Williams' writes how female slaves would have positive religious experiences in the wilderness. She references, for an example, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) where Black women are encouraged to dance, sing, cry and love different parts of their bodies.

Utilizing Williams' framework, if a black woman's body was used to bring forth God's Son into the world, then (Black) bodies are sacred to God. Therefore, I submit that this re-interpretation calls for the care of not just our spiritual selves, but our (Black) bodies as well. This means a portion of the religious education curriculum must proclaim the wisdom of self-care which includes emotional, mental, spiritual, and social health. When religious educators re-interpret the incarnation, following Williams' lead, Black mothers are taught by religious educators, (their other mothers, relatives, sister friends, their biological mothers and

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<sup>572</sup> Teel, *Racism and the Image of God*.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

grandmothers), to understand that they embody the divine genetic code. However, it is not enough for black mothers to know this. What had to be understood is that the way black mothers express love, teach spiritual wisdom via culture, provide care to their children, and care for themselves, the way mothers teach their children spiritual lessons about life is also a powerful political act.<sup>574</sup> In this way, Black mothers teach to each other the awareness of the presence of divinity within themselves and how to practice it, and then present it to Black youth in their local religious communities. Black mothers bring the theology of black wellness to the center of all they do in these two religious communities, through storytelling, through expressions of culture, through the transmission of spiritual wisdom, through radical love offered to themselves and their female religious educators. This is all done to prepare black youth to be poised, and to enable them to unlock their own spiritual and physical resilience at a time when youth need to construct political strategies for navigating anti-black, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, patriarchal systems of domination and rhetoric inside and outside of their communities.

Additionally Williams maintains, human bodies are more than a medium of encounter: they are sites of incarnation. The Biblical text asserts the incarnation began when “the Spirit Mounted Mary.” With this being noted, Williams urges religious educators not to isolate God’s encounter with humanity by dismissing the importance of God meeting humanity through bodily experiences. In discussing the image of God, Williams’ writes that the incarnation happened in Mary as God “mounted” her in efforts to impregnate her with the Holy Spirit. Williams’ writes that Mary’s body thus became a site of the incarnation and that next it was Jesus who received an outpouring of the Spirit and that the site of that incarnation is Jesus’s body. Williams maintains that the incarnation actually occurred in multiple bodies: in Mary, Jesus, and the body of the

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<sup>574</sup> Jennifer C. Nash, "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality," *Meridians* 11, no. 2 (2011): 1-24, doi:10.2979/meridians.11.2.1.

church. She writes that as the incarnation is accomplished in the outpouring of the Spirit into the church body, this allows for an incarnation to happen in anybody. She continues to discuss a womanist perspective of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as it continues to happen in Black motherhood. This outpouring allows Black mothers to survive the atrocities of social terrorism and not only to survive, but oftentimes to thrive in the face of adversity. Williams has affirmed her belief that Jesus is not the only being to experience incarnation in human history, but Mary experienced it as well. Mary was drenched with a spirit of resiliency and so are the African American male and female youths who are reared by Black mothers. Black males are offspring of Black women, who, as Delores William reminds us, are the first site of incarnation. Therefore, Black male bodies and Black female bodies are also sites of incarnation, divine love, and creativity. Although many Black male and female bodies are locked up, their souls are sustained by the outpouring of God's spirit. Williams has made a radical statement in her claim that the incarnation didn't happen only with Jesus, but in the body of every Black women. This insight has assisted oppressed people to identify with the highest form of godliness and to see in many human bodies the manifestation of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the divine Trinity.

### **Mothering as Not Just a Biological Concept, but a Sociological and Spiritual Concept as Well**

In this ethnographic work, I am suggesting that mothering is – but is not limited to – a physical, spiritual, communal, and continual process; therefore in reality mothering does not *have to be* a cis-gendered female experience. However, in this ethnographic study, mothering is a cis-gendered female experience. I suggest that male-bodied individuals can provide mothering experiences. This is simply the way the divine Spirit decided to reproduce Jesus through Mary's body. Mothering is not just a biological concept in my work, but it *is* and *should be* sociological,



and must be communal in nature, rooted in the framework of Mother Mary's experience as she serves as a conduit of the birthing process. Additionally, the Prophet Muhammad's wife Khadijah serves as a figure who offered wisdom, patience and insights to him in the early period of his revelation, not unlike support linked to expressions of motherhood to young men charted throughout this project. The primary argument in this chapter is that in African American religious hubs and cultural communities, Black motherhood as is more than just a biological concept. Many Black "mothers" in religious spaces have mothered black children since before slavery. During slavery, of course, it was out of obligation. Now, however, Black religious buildings are places where the sociological aspect of "mothering" is still going down. It's what Zenzele Isoke's *Urban Black Women and the Politics of Resistance*, called cultural production as "work."<sup>575</sup>

### **Black Women Utilizing Space as a Resistance Tool**

During my ethnographic interviews with the Black Mothers in the Masjid in Los Angeles, I gained a significant insight into how children were being religiously educated – it was in the method in which space was used. This reverberates with what Bracke and Tye in *Teaching the Bible in the Church* (2003) refer to as the null curriculum. Susana Torre wrote one of the articles I reviewed to understand the concept.<sup>576</sup> Torre reports what Argentinian women did in regard to the politics of space during a very dark time in their history when a few women mobilized throughout the country to combat the injustices being done to their children and their husbands. These women acted on their own terms rather than accepting the gendered roles assigned to them by patriarchal and sexist imaginations.

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<sup>575</sup> Isoke, *Urban Black Women*, 88.

<sup>576</sup> Susana Torre, "Claiming the Public Space: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo" in *The Sex of Architecture*, eds. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, Leslie Kanes Weisman, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 140–145.

Today, few depictions can be found of those women who led the charge to develop urban spaces. Women today are recognized for applying a white purist perspective to the construction of modern European architecture in European capitals.<sup>577</sup> This classism excludes an entire group of women leaders who do not see or build the world from a white purist perspective, who are women who are socialized differently and who embody gender and class distinctions<sup>578</sup>

Historically, women came with basins to wash garments in public sources of water such as rivers and lakes.<sup>579</sup> These served as social gathering spots for women in Africa and India and the San Antonio Riverwalk in Texas.<sup>580</sup> Marginalized populations also historically gathered in and transformed spaces for practical use. Torre calls them female-influenced environments.

More recently, women leaders have struggled to transform urban environments into places of cultural significance. Applying their enormous creativity and their limited resources, the female influenced enclaves generally serves both practical purposes and social functions.

Turning their own limited appropriated sites into public urban spaces symbolizes the tight restrictions placed on women. In 1992, the largest social protest engaged in by women that involved their occupation of space involved their march to the National Mall in Washington D.C. That march was a mass demonstration for women who supported women's health care and abortion rights and another was for lesbian and gay rights when the AIDS quilt was also displayed in the National Mall.<sup>581</sup> The AIDS quilt was begun in 1985; it was a cloth quilt with each square naming someone who had died of AIDS. It was taken to several cities by the

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 140–145.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid

Argentinian women and each time it was laid out so everyone could see it.<sup>582</sup> In 1987 it was taken to the National Mall in Washington DC and laid out on the ground in the Mall. Eventually more than 49,000 squares were created for the quilt. Torre write that these women are transforming the city by not being passive subjects but by being agents of change. Torre writes that it is women who alter a city's perception of its women.<sup>583</sup>

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo captured international attention with their sustained presence in Argentina. Beginning in 1977 and continuing for years, the women met every week in the city plaza to protest the disappearance of their children during the military dictatorship. The Mothers of Plaza de Maya occupied this public space and used it to enact a protest. This political action allowed the Mothers to redefine space as something that cannot be defined by buildings, but is brought into existence by social action. Women who were bereaved mothers of tortured and killed children under a regime of a chaotic violent government that kidnapped people in broad daylight, and placed formerly autonomous institutions such as universities and unions under government control.<sup>584</sup> A group of the women began a private protest and as they grew stronger their protest dared to denounce the Argentinian Military. Their efforts gained public significance and eventually took down a terrorist government and ushered in a democratic government. When considering their appropriation of the Plaza, it is important to note that the Plaza de Mayo is the symbolic equivalent of the Washington Mall. But the two public spaces have different significance. One is where the Creoles stood as the demanded independence from Spain in 1810.<sup>585</sup> This space is a smaller urban center which stood for unity. As a space for public appearances for Argentinians, the most distinctive structure is the pink seat of

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 140–145.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

government. Upon reading the stories of the Mothers of the Plaza, I begin to think: What concepts of resistance are presently fueling modern day protests? I instantly begin to think of recent immigration protests in the U.S., (DACA,<sup>586</sup> DREAMERS, and BLM movements<sup>587</sup>, ME TOO# and TIMESUP,) which brought literal visibility and symbolic visibility to a range of injustices. The Mothers of the Plaza wore kerchiefs on their heads, thus representing motherhood, a visual symbol of communal garb, suggesting unity in movement, resistance to oppression, in language that spoke to the people.

The mothers of the Black children who were unlawfully lynched by the state, namely, Sabrina Fullerton, mother of Trayvon Martin, and other mothers of unarmed black children who were gunned down at the hands of police – these mothers have been dubbed “The Mothers of the Movement.”<sup>588</sup> These are the women who came together to speak out against the lynching of their children.

African American Eric Garner was put in a choke hold by police officers until he died. In protest, professional African American Basketball players, community members, families and friends protested by wearing shirts that read “I Can’t Breathe”<sup>589</sup> – the last words uttered by Garner before he died. The words have become a symbol for Black people whose minds, talents, lives are smothered in and by the United States of America.

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<sup>586</sup> “DACA Announcement Sparks Protests Nationwide, Dozens Arrested at Trump Tower.” *ABC News*, September 5, 2017. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/arrests-made-daca-protest-york/story?id=49625957>.

<sup>587</sup> “At Least 11 Arrested during Black Lives Matter Protest in New York on Heels of Sacramento Shooting.” *ABC News*, March 29, 2018. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/11-arrested-black-lives-matter-protest-york/story?id=54087227>.

<sup>588</sup> Maya A. Jones, “‘Mothers of the Movement’ Share Stories of Loss at DNC.” *The Undeclared* (blog), July 27, 2016. <https://theundefeated.com/features/mothers-of-the-movement-share-stories-of-loss-at-dnc/>.

<sup>589</sup> Matt Taibbi, “‘I Can’t Breathe’ Examines Modern Policing and the Life and Death of Eric Garner.” NPR.org. Accessed February 21, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/23/559498678/i-can-t-breathe-explores-life-and-death-at-the-hands-of-police>.

In 2016, Beyoncé brought the “Mothers of Movement” to the Video Music Award Show to give visibility to the suffering of the Black Mothers and to the state-sponsored lynching of black children. At the annual Emmy-award Show, women wore black to bring visibility to sexual harassment revealed by the #Me TOO Movement (which was started by a Black woman).<sup>590</sup> Prominent women stood in solidarity with women who had been sexually harassed and added their voices to protest sexual violence.

The African American women written about in Chapter 5 of Zenzele Isoke ’s book *Urban Black Women and the Politics of Resistance*, are cultural producers whose support for their community children is demonstrated in ways like bathing and feeding the children, and teaching them music as a tool of political resistance against the repressive U.S. government.<sup>591</sup> Additionally, Isoke writes Black women in Newark, New Jersey who utilize urban space to teach Black children to envision how their lives *should* be, a vision that includes changing corrupt voting processes, and transforming youth programs, and revitalizing murals and dilapidated buildings. These Black women who provide life-enhancing services to their community are described by Isoke as “cultural workers” because they run for political office, teach young leaders to critique their city conditions in efforts to determine where transformation should take place. Black women view politics as a way to imagine social spaces in a distinctively new way. Isoke sees these Black women as educators who prioritize the voices of young Black people in New Jersey. In urban neighborhoods in Newark, New Jersey. Black women turn their spaces (i.e. classrooms, living rooms, kitchens, front porches) into places where black youth will understand that they are loved and accepted for who they are. While I interviewed the Black

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<sup>590</sup> Najja Parker, “Meet the Woman Who Started the Me Too Movement a Decade Ago.” Accessed February 21, 2019. <https://www.ajc.com/news/world/who-tarana-burke-meet-the-woman-who-started-the-too-movement-decade-ago/i8NEiuFHKaIvBh9ucukidK/>.

<sup>591</sup> Isoke, *Urban Black Women*

youth at the church in San Bernardino County and the mosque in Los Angeles, the Black women religious educator intentionally utilized a variety of different spaces inside and outside the buildings as places to teach young voices. The teachers, who were also their mothers, taught these youths that their bodies were sacred spaces for God's spirit to dwell. And they taught in spaces as varied as offices, classrooms, the parking lot, the fellowship hall and auditorium.

### ETHNOGRAPHY SECTION

When I visited the African American mosque, I was scheduled to meet and interview Malikah, an eleven-year-old biracial Black and Pilipino male and his mother, Sistah Nazia. I drove into the inner city Los Angeles neighborhood, where the Waheed Mosque is located. I walked to the gate surrounding the religious hub, my head covered with a long, burgundy, flower-embroidered scarf, much like scarves worn by other Muslim women I have engaged on the streets in my East Atlanta neighborhood, at my graduate university, and have seen on women worshipping in the mosque. The *hijab* head covering is worn by many Muslim women daily and in sacred spaces. Jamilah Karim writes in her work, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah* that Muslim women wearing a *hijab* are even more likely to be marked as holding the Muslim religious identity than Muslim devotees that do not cover, no matter their race or ethnic identity. Karim writes that wearing the *hijab* is not only an identity marker for women of different ethnic and racial communities, but wearing the head garb is a way in which Islamic women negotiate space. Karim writes,

Alongside ethnic identity, *ummah* consciousness persists in the American *ummah* because how Muslims of diverse ethnic backgrounds encounter and interact with one another through actual *ummah* networks. Muslim identity marks a person as a member of the *ummah*, and Muslim women who wear a *hijab* are even more likely to be marked as such. With Muslims expected to acknowledge and even greet one another with wishes of peace when they cross paths, visible Muslim identity functions as the primary medium of

connection. Muslims also make *ummah* connections through real institutions: mosques, schools, homes, and community organizations.<sup>592</sup>

## ETHNOGRAPY SECTION

As I acknowledge Sister Ami at the gate of Waheed, I am thinking about how she must negotiate space as an African American Muslim female greeting an African American Christian female will have changed for her because the medium of connection, as written about by Karim, has changed. How will the intra-racial sameness and the religious differences impact our dialogue and engagement in this urban religious educational experience? Will I be thought of as voyeuristic because I am an ordained Christian in a predominately Muslim space? I am hyper-sensitive that although the U.S. has a diverse pool of religious beliefs, Christianity holds a majority presence in the U.S. Additionally, I am aware of the constant surveillance this community undergoes as Islamophobia continues in the U.S. Will I be seen as another sister to the Black Muslim women in the mosque? I am dressed casually wearing a pair of blue jeans and a peach blouse. I am excited to re-engage with the imam's wife, Sister Ami, who has a very strong presence in this community as an educator. Sister Ami, her head, shoulders, and arms are covered with a long *hijab*, greets me with a warm welcoming hug. She is smiling and is adorned in a bright yellow floor-length dress, and a jean's jacket. I offer the standard Arabic greeting of peace "*As-salāmu 'alaykum*" and Sister Ami responds by saying, "*Wa 'alaykumu s-salām*" which means, "And peace be upon you too!" I am escorted by Sister Ami, into Waheed to meet Malikah's mother, a short, slender Pilipino woman, with a kind face, who works at the mosque as an Arabic teacher for the younger children. Sister Nazia is fully covered wearing a dark red *hijab* and an olive green floor-length dress. I am told that Sister Nazia is also a Hip Hop

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<sup>592</sup> Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah*. (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 13.

artist/performer and poet. I am enthusiastic about listening to the stories she has to tell about her relationship with Hip Hop music, her philosophy as it relates to being a mother to a Black male youth, narratives concerning her Muslim identity and her job as a religious educator at a predominately African American mosque. Before our interview, I was given a tour of the classroom space, and I noticed that the bulletin boards have positive messages that the youths encounter daily. The words written in bold black letters read, “Hands are NOT for Hitting.” Does that space teach without Sister Nazia having to verbalize a message? I thought about how Sister Nazia’s classroom bulletin board messages taught her students that not only was the space sacred, but their black bodies are sacred spaces, and therefore parts of the body are to be utilized appropriately. Little hands were dipped in different colors of paint and their prints stamped all over the bulletin board. One message read, “Hands are for hugging and for holding stuff,” another message read, “Hands are for eating food,” and lastly “Hands are for opening the refrigerator.” These special messages about the sacredness of Black bodies teach that non-violence is the appropriate method of engagement with each other, and they present implicit messages of love and care for each other’s bodies and of one’s own body. The physical spaces in the Waheed mosque are being well-used to teach messages that combat the pathologizing messages that describe Black youths as physically violent savages.

### **Utilizing Space and Place as a Tool of Resistance**



Lakeyta Bonnette argues that the artform of Hip Hop is used by oppressed groups for political resistance not only in the US, but around the world.<sup>593</sup> Black youths utilize Hip Hop music as a tactic to voice their opinions and resist oppression. In the Black Hip Hop community, she claims, it is especially the youth who are glossed over. Therefore Hip Hop music allows them a platform to express their grievances. This sub-marginalized group has embraced and utilized rap music as a method, space, and organizing tactic not only to fight injustice but also to voice their opinions, detail their grievances, and express their outrage. As a form of resistance “oppressed people use language, dance and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion”<sup>594</sup> A direct link can be made between how youth are made spiritually resilient through their engagement with Hip Hop music, and how their mothers teach them to utilize their bodies as sacred spaces.

## ETHNOGRAPHY SECTION

The narratives utilized in Hip Hop music are forms of religious pedagogy, but the implicit and explicit curriculum taught from Black female religious educators about care for the Black body is a political act and an act of spiritual resilience training. Take for example Sister Janice, an engineer at a U.S. military trained facility, who has worked as the Youth and Young Adult Director at Temple AME Church for many years. Sister Janice is a Black female Christian educator who has two children who are college-age adults. She learned that Black youth in her Church in San Bernardino County needed to be taught the difference between “good” touch and harmful touch, as a way to combat sexual abuse and bodily trauma in all of its forms. She

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<sup>593</sup> Lakeyta M. Bonnette, *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 36.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

conversed with me about what she taught the youth at Temple. Additionally, I conversed with Sister Janice about why education concerning the health of the Black body and the way people interacted with a young person is critical at this point. Sister Janice reasoned that many youths in the church come from the foster care system, and they are not taught the principles a child might receive in a stable home environment. Therefore, Sister Janice incorporates bodily care in her Sunday School curriculum as she conducts Church school. This is also complemented with religious education about Black bodies being temples and, therefore, sacred spaces **Religious educators, mainly Black mothers teach Black youth males that the Black body is** the only sacred space you have when you are standing in close proximity to social death. The Black body is taught to *be* the place where care and kindness happens in a world that pathologizes one's blackness.

### **The Importance of the Black Counter Public (a safe space of withdrawal)**

Bonnette writes that after slavery the church was experienced as a place of safety where Blacks could remove themselves from white terrorism. However, in Charleston South Carolina a White terrorist named Dylann Roof<sup>595 596 597</sup> reminded the Black community that even their supposedly safe spaces cannot always provide protection. Dylann was NOT a government authority. However, Dylann, and governmental authorities target Blacks. Hip Hop teaches a religious pedagogy that requires young black males to see their minds, their eyes, their ears, their

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<sup>595</sup> Lindsey Bever, "'I'm Just a Sociopath,' Dylann Roof Declared after Deadly Church Shooting Rampage, Court Records Say," *The Washington Post*, accessed December 5, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/05/17/im-just-a-sociopath-dylann-roof-declared-after-deadly-church-shooting-spree-court-records-say/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.54a222cf58b6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/05/17/im-just-a-sociopath-dylann-roof-declared-after-deadly-church-shooting-spree-court-records-say/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.54a222cf58b6).

<sup>596</sup> Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist: The Making Of Dylann Roof," *GQ*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.gq.com/story/dylann-roof-making-of-an-american-terrorist>.

<sup>597</sup> Avalon Zoppo, "Charleston Shooter Dylann Roof Now on Death Row at Indiana Facility," *NBC News*, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/charleston-church-shooting/charleston-shooter-dylann-roof-moved-death-row-terre-haute-federal-n749671>.

emotions as part of the temple that is their body. It is this temple that is the personal safe space of young black males and can be a powerful means of social resistance. This message is taught consistently by their other mothers, their religious communities, and Hip Hop. It is especially focused on young Black males because their lives are constantly in close proximity to social death. What does it mean to a young black Muslim youth who is disrespected in the confines of his classroom, when the teacher mocks the boy's religious tradition by asking him to stand up in front of the class to pray. Ten-year-old Issa, has described the burden he carries by being pathologized daily. He describes the angst of living in such close proximity to social death in the interview below:

### **Political Resistance of Hip Hop**

Bonnette points out that rap music aids blacks in attitude formation,<sup>598</sup> specifically referring to Black Nationalistic and Black Feminist attitudes, while noting that Gangsta rap is looked at as the standard for the genre.<sup>599</sup> But there are in fact different types of rap music. For example, in *The Soul of Hip Hop*: White Hodge, analyzes the differences in rap music genres.<sup>600</sup> White Hodge writes that other genres have influenced the creation of music. He notes how Rap is fueled and shaped by the experiences of racial oppression. White Hodge notes, "Contemporary rappers, like early bluespeople, are responding to the 'burden of freedom' in part by relaying portrayals of reality to their audiences through their personal experiences."<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Bonnette, *Pulse of the People*, 3-4.

<sup>599</sup> Isoke, *Urban Black Women*, 23.

<sup>600</sup> White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop*, 41.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

Research for this section has been limited to six individuals: three black Christian youth and three black Muslim youths. The project conducted a meaningful analysis of their experiences and motivations. The study will conduct what Isoke refers to as a counter narrative to the widely racist-sexist discourse of black women and young black males that is prevalent as part of the media's pathologization of blackness. Following the same path as Isoke's work, my research counters the racist discourses of black people as lazy, hypersexual, baby-making "hoodrats," welfare queens," or "nappy headed hos." Isoke used for her research what Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant has described as a voice-centered framework. Isoke's project is focused on listening to the voices of black women, what they have to say about politics, their lives in politics and their spaces.

Hip Hop has a strong relationship to political and social issues. Bonnette has argued that political rap provides information, but also shapes attitudes. Like the Black arts movement, the Hip Hop movement is seen as a cultural extension of politics in the black community. Hip Hop is an effective cultural platform from which artists advocate for the involvement and resistance of the marginalized.

Bonnette also writes about the secondary level of marginalization imposed on African Americans who are gay and lesbian. Rap music, which represents a source of political information for a segment of the population, has the ability to affect the political attitudes and knowledge of its listeners. Tricia Rose explains that rap is a voice for the concerns of inner city youth. She states that rap has "articulated the pleasures and problems of Black urban life in contemporary America" (Rose 1994: 2). Not only has rap recently experienced an increase in the diversity of its audience, but it has also seen an increase in the political activities of rap artists. In 2001 Michael Dawson demonstrated in his research "that both exposure to rap music

and the belief that it constitutes an important resource of the Black community play substantial roles in shaping Black political opinion both directly and indirectly'' (Dawson 2001: 78).

### **The Black Body as a Counter Space in Political Activism**

Bonnette writes about the increase of political activism among rap artists. Meek Mill is a rap artist who was brutalized by government sanctioned-violence and is now using his fame and star power to speak out on social media platforms and news media outlets to assist the Black males in finding their political voices. The artist was recently filmed hosting a media press conference with his community standing behind him as he told his story, and his experience to another racially motivated arrest of two black male entrepreneurs who were waiting in a restaurant for a third person to arrive for a meeting. Although the two Black young males were sitting quietly at a table in their neighborhood Starbucks, a barista called the local police department to detain them, as if they were disturbing the peace. In fact the two men had caused no disruption. Rapper Meek Mill<sup>602 603</sup> is one example of an artist who speaks to the spiritual yearnings of youth, provides identity formation in his music, narrates his own personal story of police brutality and governmental sanctioned violence, and describes life in urban cities as it relates to social ills. Black youths take the rap artist's narrative, and specifically identify how it mirrors their own narrative through priestly listening, and recitation and retention, and use the rap artist's lyrical text as sacred rhetoric so that it becomes their Holy Writ.

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<sup>602</sup> Kiersten Willis, "Why Meek Mill Says the Arrest of Black Men at Starbucks Would Have Ended Differently For Him," *Atlanta Black Star*, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://atlantablackstar.com/2018/04/17/meek-mill-says-arrest-black-men-starbucks-ended-differently/>.

<sup>603</sup> Michael Tanenbaum, "From Prison, Meek Mill Joins CNN's Don Lemon, Weighs in on Starbucks Fiasco," *Philly Voice*, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.phillyvoice.com/meek-mill-cnn-starbucks-don-lemon-prison-philadelphia-rapper/>.

The Black Body as a repository for singing church music/chanting/Quranic recitation/poetry Hip Hop recitation and dance. The pastor of the church in LA where I conduct my ethnographic interviews calls on Black youths to stand on Sunday mornings in the sanctuary and recite the Scripture text during worship. This is an act of resistance and spiritual recovery and demonstrates for black youth how to practice spiritual resilience in their religious communities.

The repetition of phrases and the call and response techniques utilized by Black ministers and Black imams during their sermons and during the *khutbahs* for African American imams in the mosque context reflect these techniques. Bonnette echoes Kitwana's research that records the style of black leaders like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr in engaging their congregants as a style that is synonymous with rap's unique artistic delivery. This style is syncopated, rhythmic, repetitious, and a call-and-response element.<sup>604</sup> In Mazen Hashem's article, "The Muslim Friday Khutba: Veiled and Unveiled,"<sup>605</sup> Hashem formulates his experience of conducting ethnographic research for an African-American mosque in Los Angeles which was submitted to the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. Hashem writes, "The African-American *khatib* was enthusiastically engaged in what can be described as 'repetitious preaching.'"<sup>606</sup>

### Gendered violence in Hip Hop

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<sup>604</sup> Bonnette, *Pulse of the People*, 39.

<sup>605</sup> "The Muslim Friday Khutba: Veiled and Unveiled Themes | ISPU," *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding*, accessed October 1, 2009, <https://www.ispu.org/the-muslim-friday-khutba-veiled-and-unveiled-themes/>.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

Hip Hop music is a reflection of the society we live in. When we converse about the violence against black women and LGBTQIA+ people, we should take note that we live in a society where gender discrimination, hyper masculinity, toxic masculinity, domestic violence, and discrimination against sexual orientation rampant. Hip Hop culture in general, and rap music specifically were not created independent of societal factors, in fact they developed as a response to and are interactive with these societal atrocities. Although rap has themes that glorify violence and hypersexuality and machismo/bravado rap music is not all bad. There are different genres of Hip Hop music. What we see and hear in the rap and Hip Hop cultures is a reflection of the social climate experienced by those artists.

One important element of Hip Hop is that it offers a fun and communally experienced cultural phenomenon embodying core elements of emceeing (rap music), deejaying, graffiti (and street art), b-boying, and (b-girling), entrepreneurship, and knowledge of self, with values of self and community improvement – all of which continue to evolve as lived experiences across generations, racial and ethnic groups, socioeconomic statuses, genders, and regional boundaries.

### **Hip Hop constructed as a lived Spiritual experience**

Spiritual resilience as a valued assumption has been entrenched in Hip Hop culture because religiosity and culture are intricately linked. For that reason, we should not divorce artistic expressions of Hip Hop culture from the methods used by the artists to present these art forms. Hip Hop has historically been a chronicle of the lived experiences of oppressed Africans and African Americans. As such, Hip Hop has spread its influence via narratives, songs, artwork, dance technologies, clothing styles. It has impacted businesses and fostered knowledge of self. Its constant message has been to become liberated from all forms of oppression. Below is my

argument on the immersion of spirituality and religiosity fixed into Hip Hop's roots via the Black prophetic tradition, Black sonic tradition, and Black oral tradition as resistance inherent in Hip Hop music. This is a methodology of spiritual resilience for black Muslim and Christian youth which is taught via Black religious education.

Author and Black religion scholar, Anthony Reddie, makes a solid case for the oral tradition in African and African Caribbean life being a pedagogical tool used for faith formation for youth by religious educators who explore the proverbial wisdom that forms outside of text-based communication by means of the creative interactions within communities. Additionally, Grant Shockley writes about methods used in black life to pass down spiritual language and African American wisdom via the oral tradition. People from Africa and the African diaspora have for ages passed on their wisdom through storytelling. Black Christians have expressed their faith through story-telling on Sundays and preaching and retelling of biblical stories. Shockley believes that the importance of oral communication has the power to inspire, transform, and energize Black congregants. This tradition of oral transmission of Black expressions of faith can be utilized to engage youth around the issues that they confront. For example, orations have inspired Civil Rights leaders and participants in Black Lives Matters to incorporate their woes and struggles into oral art form inspired by Black traditions.

Additionally, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement and leaders in the Black Arts Movement incorporated jazz, folk, R&B and gospel, not only utilizing music everyone could relate to, but creating music that inspired and encouraged them to effect the needed changes in America.



The paradox is that valid assumptions have been made about Hip Hop culture that are drastically different from the facts just presented, namely that Hip Hop culture promotes the physical and spiritual well-being of its practitioners.<sup>607</sup>

Practical Theology is described by Dale P Andrews as theology that swings back and forth between the axis of theory and practice.<sup>608</sup> I maintain that Hip Hop artists are in a sense practical theologians who take their religious experience and turn it into narratives that we can perform, recite, and dance to.

### **Black Music as Resistance**

Bonnette writes about how music was used as a resistance tool by African slaves on the plantations. Specifically the lyrics of African spirituals were utilized as a means to escape bondage.<sup>609</sup> Bonnette notes Harlem Renaissance writers, among them Langston Hughes, who used their art as a tool of social activism. Hughes was heavily influenced by African American music as a means of social critique and creative expression. He wrote about jazz music and bebop music having code words and phrases that blacks used to sing of their struggles and express themselves to other black folks as they worked together. Billie Holliday used her artistry to protest injustices and racial discrimination against blacks by reclaiming a poem entitled “Strange Fruit” which speaks of the lynching’s of Black folks.<sup>610</sup> African American music has always resisted political exclusion and addressed social injustice.

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<sup>607</sup> Bonnette, *Pulse of the People*, 24.

<sup>608</sup> Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>609</sup> Bonnette, 33–34.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–35

### **Oral tradition a foundation for Hip Hop music**

Dr. Henry Louis Gates states, “in efforts to speak about Black ideology one must begin with the Black oral tradition.”<sup>611</sup> Going beyond Dr. Gate’s argument, I argue that the Black prophetic tradition needs equal treatment in the conversation. Oral tradition includes the prophetic and the oral tradition which is textually based. When we leave out the prophetic tradition it does a disservice to the Black religious community because one can never speak of Black ideology without speaking of the Black religious experience.

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<sup>611</sup> Ibid., 34.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FROM HYMNODY TO HIP-HOP: MOTHERS, MUSIC, AND THE MOVEMENT

#### Conclusion

African American spirituals<sup>612</sup> captures the longings, eschatological hopes, and terrors of the enslaved West African people who were violently kidnapped and packed as cargo onto slave ships and driven across the trans-Atlantic. These enslaved persons strongly desired existential freedom from physical oppression, as a result, created methods in which their spirits and minds could grasp an ounce of reprieve while in their Black bodies. African American slaves laboring on plantations in the Southern U.S., created vaults of oral communication, and spiritual wisdom utilizing enigmas that only the enslaved community could understand. These encrypted, emotionally charged messages, begged the God of justice to reign down on their white captures, and grant the enslaved a home of freedom, over the Jordan River. The African American spirituals were sung in harmony along the wooded secret meeting places, or “hush harbors”<sup>613</sup> of the invisible slave institution, even though these activities could cause the enslaved to lose their lives. Craig von Buseck remarks,

southern slaves developed plantation songs that also carried coded messages. Only the slaves knew their meaning. It was through these songs that important information was passed along a system of communication throughout the South. Coded songs conveyed

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<sup>612</sup> “The Origins of the Spirituals.” *CBN.com - The Christian Broadcasting Network*, September 25, 2013. <http://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/the-origins-of-the-spirituals>.

<sup>613</sup> Andrews, *Practical Theology*, 17, 41.

messages about rebellions or escapes through the Underground Railroad... The spirituals became a bloodline, bringing the vital flow of hope and faith to the emotional and spiritual heart of the slave. Through these melodies they held onto the hope of survival. By them, a unique and vibrant community formed. They served as a second language that only the slaves understood. Through these songs the slaves expressed in subtle words and melody their pain, loneliness, weariness, and sorrow - but also their hope and determination to live on.<sup>614</sup>

Similar to the African American Spirituals Hip Hop music (rap) contains narratives of people from the African diaspora, who desire to be free from the plethora of ways their blackness is pathologized.<sup>615</sup> Similar to the black expressive musical art forms listed, I contend that street rap is a creative way rap artist maneuver their bodies resist the position that mainstream society continuously attempt to relegate Black people to, the margins of society. Through my research working alongside two Black religious communities, I encountered so many different forms of violence committed against the people, specifically the African American male youth. This begun my desire to research Orlando Patterson's term social death to describe how these Black Christian and Muslim youth whom are being racially discriminated against. This brought me to think of how this research could to re-engage sociologist of religion, W.E.B. Dubois, question "How does it feel to be the problem?" in an innovative way that is interdisciplinary, and interfaith. By including Dubois thoughts that

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> Throughout this research I attempt to examine news article and books in efforts to describe how African American boys, girls, their mothers and fathers are treated like a disease simply because of the color of their skin. I specifically am reminded that my research took a turn when I encountered the mothers of the Black Muslim youth, and the book I encountered about Sara Bartman by Sander Gilman, the author of *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*.

incorporated, the ecstasy of the body in Black Church worship intrigued me because of his ethnographic engagement with the “preacher,” the “shouting frenzy,” and the “music.”

Dubois described the nuances of Black religious pain and the different way we blacks express pain. After thinking about the how black pain is internalized and expressed, I also wanted to understand how these pains are contained and embodied in everyday life. Who teaches the skill of releasing pain in positive ways through narrative, Hip Hop, dancing, praying, and recitation?

### **ETHOGRAPHY SECTION**

As I visited the Black masjid, and the Black Church space, I encounter Black women religious leaders conducting the cultural production work as it relate to positive ways to be in community through activism and spiritual practices. For example, Raj, the mother of two of my interviewees, is a Black, female, Muslim educator about 40 years of age. She conversed with me about her office being, “the place where everything that happens in the Black LA Muslim community, starts here.” Her mother walks in a beautiful, dark-skinned Muslim woman in her early sixties. Raj is completely covered, with a nose ring and a smooth milk chocolate complexion. They are handling administrative business, as the teachers at the Muslim school come in with children or to mount fliers for the next event. I am introduced to Nazia’s son, he is ten years old, and his eyes are kind. I am excited to meet Tahil, a Filipino and Black male youth. However, I am even more excited about the amount of wisdom and courage that these Black women possess who are running this religious space. I am sure, that it was at this point, during this afternoon in the masjid, in Los Angeles where my research took a major turn. These Black female religious educators were disrupting space. These women were teaching the youth how to make the call to prayer. These teachers of Arabic, and the teachers of the Quran were

teaching youth how to use, not just their physical bodies to resist the pathologizing that exist in society about them.

The youth put on a community play that allowed them to utilize Hip Hop song as a method in which they could express their thoughts about school, and the ways to resist negative influences. This program was facilitated and choreographed by the women religious educators for the different grade levels. During another program, which I witnessed at the end of their school year, many of the children at the Masjid

The relationships built through the love and care of Black women the communal spaces I study, how the women give and cultivate a place of belonging and care for the black youth in their religious communities. Zenzele Isoke use the term “homemaking” as an effective form of resistance because it involves more than just being attentive to and providing care to individuals. It also requires building an enduring affective relationship to persons and to the physical environment.

Isoke claims that homemaking is how black women resist the alienating and dehumanizing practices and ideologies that continue to ghettoize and minoritize black people in Central Ward Newark. Isoke claims that homemaking goes far beyond voting, it makes people and bodies care about space. Politics are immediate and measured in flesh and blood realities. Love must extend to the struggling people at hand; to people struggling right next to you as much as to the anonymous and amorphous mass of humanity. Isoke defines care as embracing the ideals of community engagement, acceptance of the burden of meeting an identified need, and demonstrating a sustained effort to maintain continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. Isoke lists black women who began to document the history of

black women in the U.S. These Black female scholars whose names are listed by Isoke are expressing their political agency through “community mothering.”

In my research I would like to add that knowledge production of spiritual text are work. The knowledge productions of the community leaders and the Black women in these communities. The work the women are doing in these two spaces is work as well.

Isoke writes that Amina feels the most important part of her political work is telling the story, of black cultural and political resistance, She makes and hold political space by telling stories about her community through poetry and the spoken word. Amina helps in after school programs in her neighborhood, She imagines and reclaim Newark as sacred space that gives birth too musical legends. She helps the young people witness the bars and dilapidated spaces as sites for reclaiming black cultural productivity.

One of the Black female educators who Isoke highlights as a disruptor of space is Fredrica. Fredrica realized her life time goal by opening a charter school for Black Americans by adding to the New Jersey curriculum with African diasporic histories and Kwanzaa principles to educate the NJ youth. Isoke reminds us that Fredrica’s political work should be looked at as more than Black nationalism. It serves as black feminism spatial praxis because her cultural work spiraled beyond her wanting to provide a home for her biological children to transforming the entire Central Ward and establishing a communal home for youth of African descent in the neighborhood. Isoke lists her raw materials as organizing skills, her ability to excavate and provide methods to actively resist racial domination and her power to create sustainable spaces of cultural resistance.

### **Hip Hop as Political Resistance**

In her book, *Pulse of the People*, Lakeyta Bonnette remarks in the Introduction:

“Clearly, Hip Hop has a strong relationship with political and social issues.”

In *Hip Hop*, Black rappers demand political inclusion writes Bonnette. Bonnette describes her theatre-going experience when she saw Dave Chappell’s film “Block Party.” She recalls feeling “invigorated and excited” about righting the political wrongs against Black America because of the poetry and rap that had been performed on the screen in front of her. Bonnette asks the question, Does rap music influence attitudes or behaviors? Bonnette answers her own question with a resounding “Yes,” based on her own experience. I have questions that are similar to Bonnette's: Does rap music move people to connect to a more spiritual power? Is the music the spiritual power/spiritual force that drives folks to resist oppression in its many forms? Specifically how would those questions be answered by young African American male religious youth in African American Christian and African American Muslim contexts in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties in Southern California.

After listening to Block party rappers, Bonnette recalls having a sense of euphoria and feeling both contemplative and politically charged” a feeling that she attributes to being exposed to “political rap.” This film depicted for her how culture is used as a form of resistance, despite the fact that many people feel this aspect of the rap culture is a dying art. Blacks use Hip Hop music to battle the dominant society for political inclusion Bonnette argues that Hip Hop as an art form has expanded from urban northern city spaces to commercial spaces and markets.



Isoke claims psychological violence produced by class distance made the young pregnant black woman beg and produced guilt in the writer that coupled with rage. It challenged Isoke to consider and articulate a counter-narrative to this instance of geographic domination.<sup>616</sup> Isoke interviews a 60 year old black female poet who recounts that when she was a child, her homeplace was for the entire neighborhood because her grandmother's willingness mother other people's children. Amina's grandmother's legacy of community mothering was channeled into her own political work.<sup>617</sup> She describes her grandmother doing hair of neighborhood children and giving them a bath.<sup>618</sup> Amina describes how her grandparents were musically gifted and would share their talents with other people in the neighborhood at gatherings and she called this cultural production as "work." The work Black mothers and black women in general performed was culture work.<sup>619</sup> Many commentators on social media always reply online "do it for the (black) culture." Cultural work is described by Amina, who understands her grandparents contribution to their black neighborhood in Newark as work. This is because the grandparents would come together with other community members and have parties which incorporated talents of music playing and the donation of time and numerous talents. This is a counter cultural definition of work. The grandparents served as social commentary on the importance of artistic expression for understanding of family and community. Amina considered herself as a "cultural worker."<sup>620</sup>

One of the interviewees that Isoke described is Kim. Kim didn't stay in the neighborhood, but instead of writing about Kim "selling out," Isoke writes about Kim's

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<sup>616</sup> Isoke, Z. *Urban Black Women and the Politics of Resistance*. 1st ed. 2013 edition. New York, NY Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 88.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid, 88.

narrative as one of “selling in: Isoke writes that Kim sold in to Newark by transforming the neo slave narrative of escape from urban poverty, despair...powerlessness into a story of staying home to create spaces to redefine politics as commitment care...resolve to do and be something better.

Isoke writes that the spatial stories that black political women told reveal Newark was a home worth individual sacrifices of extraordinary scores of time, energy, and resources. The importance of creating myriad forms of resistance is huge. creating living histories of resistance, Black women’s politics involve creating spaces to build healthy and nourishing relationships to the city. This is reminiscent of the work the women at the church are doing and the women at the mosque in these interviews.

Rap music is noted as being a political agent, because it authentically calls to task political wrongs. Bonnette claims Spence writes about the how rappers criticize the American legal system. As I consider the Black religious communities I research alongside, I found the dynamic of social change and resistance happening when it comes to gender. I am reminded of our black male religious educators and how they are not expected to show their tears as a form of emotional sadness.

## **ETHNOGRAPHY SECTION**

While in the Black Church, I asked the youth to think about how resistance happens in their home, their church, and their local league or sports team (basketball team, football team, derby team, or even on campus, or in a dance club. Unfortunately, the older youth agreed that we are living in a society where the women in our culture can be biased to women. Jacobi responded, “Women can act assertive or aggressive if she is asking her child to do homework or her chores, but not act assertive or aggressive in dating, or if she participates in sports, or if

she is successful in professional sports or embody a level of toughness.” I began to think about how gender oppression looks different in our society, but definitely how it exists in religious spaces. Therefore, the gender inequality gap which exist, would need to be conversed about as it exist, not only Hip-Hop music/culture, but the gender inequality that exist in how we critically engage many sacred texts, and in physical spaces that produce spiritual knowledge. “Males are not considered real men if they choose to take on professions like home decorators, stay at home dads, or hair stylist,” replied Jacobi. Jacob’s responses made me wonder how the youth I research alongside think about the women who occupy positions at their religious spaces. Each form of protest that is being touched upon is part of the resistance to the idea that feminine traits are looked as upon as weak. In our patriarchal male-dominated culture, the mere fact of being female is still looked upon as undesirable, and that is even more true about being a black female. So the reason my research took such a major turn, is that I am critiquing a male dominated narrative that fuels the spirits of both youth males and youth females, but the people who are teaching them to critic the narratives place on them by society are in deed wize and courageous Black women. The Hip Hop narratives are being critiqued and re-claimed by mothers!!!! This is conscious disruption!!

Isoke write about black women retelling counter narratives of black resistance in order to combat feelings of disconnectedness alienation and hopelessness in urban space. The last mode of resistance is “selling in” dedicating one’s professional and community life to politically uplift and encourage re engage and transform the city. This is deeply attached to the rootedness of African Americans marked history of struggle for racial and economic justice. The politics of “selling in” is a critique of the mythology of white supremacy being a thing of the past.

Isoke asserts that the appropriation of space is a political act. This can be understood as a type of resistance politics—a kind of resistance politics, black women’s politics do not just function as a spark of collective action, but through bodily sacrifices, they make in order to create nurture, and reproduce political space. Black women’s resistance is often articulated affectively through discourses of care, belonging, affect, and relationality, rather than through logic, objectivity, and rationality.

The bodily sacrifices written about above by Isoke, are embodied in the Black women at both religious sites. The following ethnographic record concludes my research and my thoughts about how this work came about, and how it will continue as long as the continuous pathologization of Black bodies, Muslim bodies, Brown bodies, and oppressed bodies all over the world ends.

*Ethnographic Reflections on the Massacre of Muslim People in New Zealand Through My Research Findings*<sup>621</sup>

I have conducted several years of research on Black Muslim and Black African Methodist Episcopal youth in San Bernidino County and Los Angeles, California; my main research question has been about their shared love of hip hop and its role in their religiosity and in developing resilient identities. This participatory action research and ethnographic research with Black Muslim families in South Los Angeles is deeply shaped by the hyperpathologization of Black youth in the city and by the fact that numerous people in our world stereotype, police, ridicule, belittle, and pathologize Muslims on a daily basis. The

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<sup>621</sup> Horgan, John. “New Zealand Acts to Reduce Mass Shootings. Why Not U.S.?” Scientific American Blog Network. Accessed April 1, 2019. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/new-zealand-acts-to-reduce-mass-shootings-why-not-u-s/>.

families that I worked with embraced me, a stranger, and received me as a Black Christian, and allowed me into their public and private spaces despite this context of vulnerability and threat. Their hospitality, care, and love for me as a human being, scholar and activist enabled me to develop a more communal research agenda. The members of these Muslim families became co-researchers and co-laborers in the interfaith struggle for justice and peace. Because of the dynamics of this set of experiences, I know how to amplify their marginalized voices, and speak alongside them. The politics and ethics of interfaith struggle as Black people has become a critical site for reflection and study in the aftermath of ongoing terrorist attacks on religious institutions. From the June 17, 2015 Charleston, South Carolina church massacre, to the March 15, 2019 Christchurch mosque massacre we are increasingly witnessing the deployment of racial and religious hatred in ways that reinforce the basic hyperpathologization of Black life in the world.

I came of age in East Atlanta where my older sister provided the soundtrack to my teenage life, narrated by Hip Hop artists like Dela Soul, Erykah Badu, Ice Cube, Big Daddy Kane, Kilo Ali, Queen Latifah, Talib Kweli, Dilated Peoples, Slum Village, The Roots, Mos Def, Tupac and Naz to name a select few. As I rapped to the beats, danced to the syncopated rhythms, and internalized the lyrics, in retrospect, it wasn't until college that I became curious about the inner workings of the religious teachings of Hip Hop music. I desired to study more about cultural icons like Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali whose names were honored in Hip Hop culture and in the rap songs of the culture icons that populated my everyday life. Developing a set of sustained questions about the intersections between religiosity and hip hop included reading (pick the four best books and name the authors and titles and years).

By 2013 during my Masters in Theology training, I co-authored an independent graduate course entitled The Contributions of African American Muslims at Claremont School of Theology where I was pursuing my graduate education. My professor, a female Southeast Asian Muslim professor, who teaches interfaith activism, community organizing, and peace and justice work became my doctoral advisor interested in my research agenda and excited about assisting me to construct a liberatory pedagogy for black male religious youth around hip hop. We began defining my research question, which evolved into: How is Hip Hop music utilized as a tool of spiritual resilience for African American male youth in Black religious communities? Building on key research on the politics of culture like Lakeyta Bonnette's *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (University of Pennsylvania 2015) my research grew hands and feet as my Southeast Asian professor and I embarked on interfaith and transracial trips to the Black Mosque in Los Angeles. She remarked that for her it was an interracial experience worshiping and praying at a predominately Black mosque with me, her doctoral student, and for me, it was an interfaith experience being a Black female Christian religious educator being embraced by Black Muslim women in a vibrant, culturally diverse city. As we sat and prayed together, standing shoulder to shoulder, and performing The Fajr prayer, "dawn prayer" which is an obligatory prayer with two rakat or (prescribed movements), and it is one of the five daily prayers offered by practicing Muslims, I thought about how the rocking of our bodies were instinctual and in sync. As we adjusted simultaneously, and held our foreheads to the ground, and crossed our arms, we were one body. One Black body. It was in this moment that my research on the hyper-pathologization of Black bodies and how we are made resilient was birthed. It was during the rocking of our bodies in rhythm and in that space and time that the ancestors reminded me that we were on the trans-Atlantic slave trade auction

blocks together. Not as Muslim, or Christian, but as Black and brown bodies that were dehumanized and despised. The ancestors reminded me that Hip Hop and the struggle for liberation and social justice is inextricably linked to the history of the African American experience, and Islam's contributions are a part of the Hip Hop story. From this experience my questions about Hip Hop in the lives of young Christians transformed to a question about Hip Hop in the lives of young Christians and young Muslims.

As a religious educator who builds interfaith community, I honor those who were massacred in the practice of their Christian faith and those massacred in the practice of their Muslim faith. Muslim lives Matter, too! Black Mobilities are the key to our freedom from LA to New Zealand. We move together or not at All!!

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